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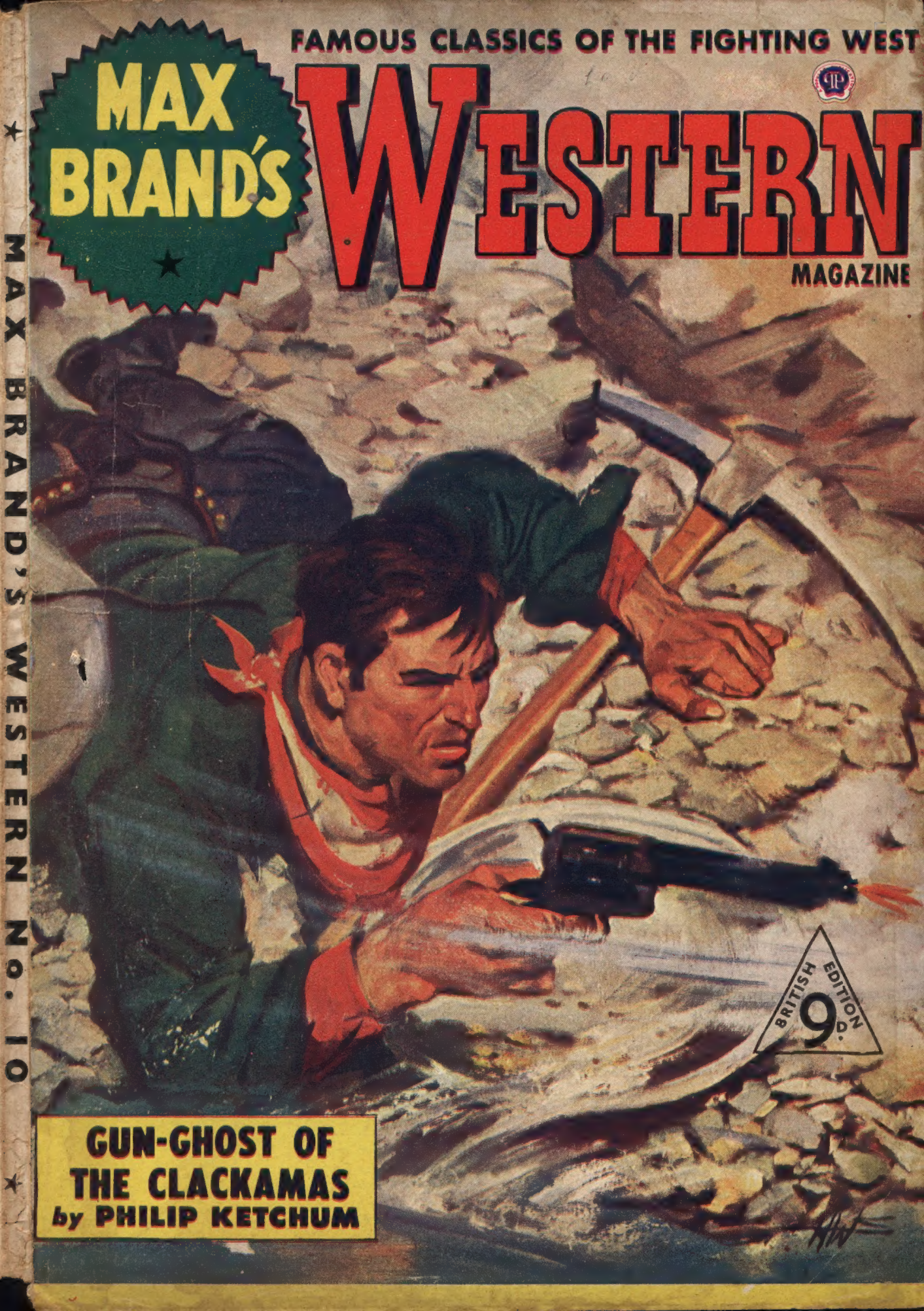

BRITISH EDITION 9d.

GUN-GHOST OF THE CLACKAMAS

by PHILIP KETCHUM

MAX BRAND'S WESTERN No. 10

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MAX BRAND'S **Western** Magazine

No. 10 British Edition

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• GUN-GHOST OF

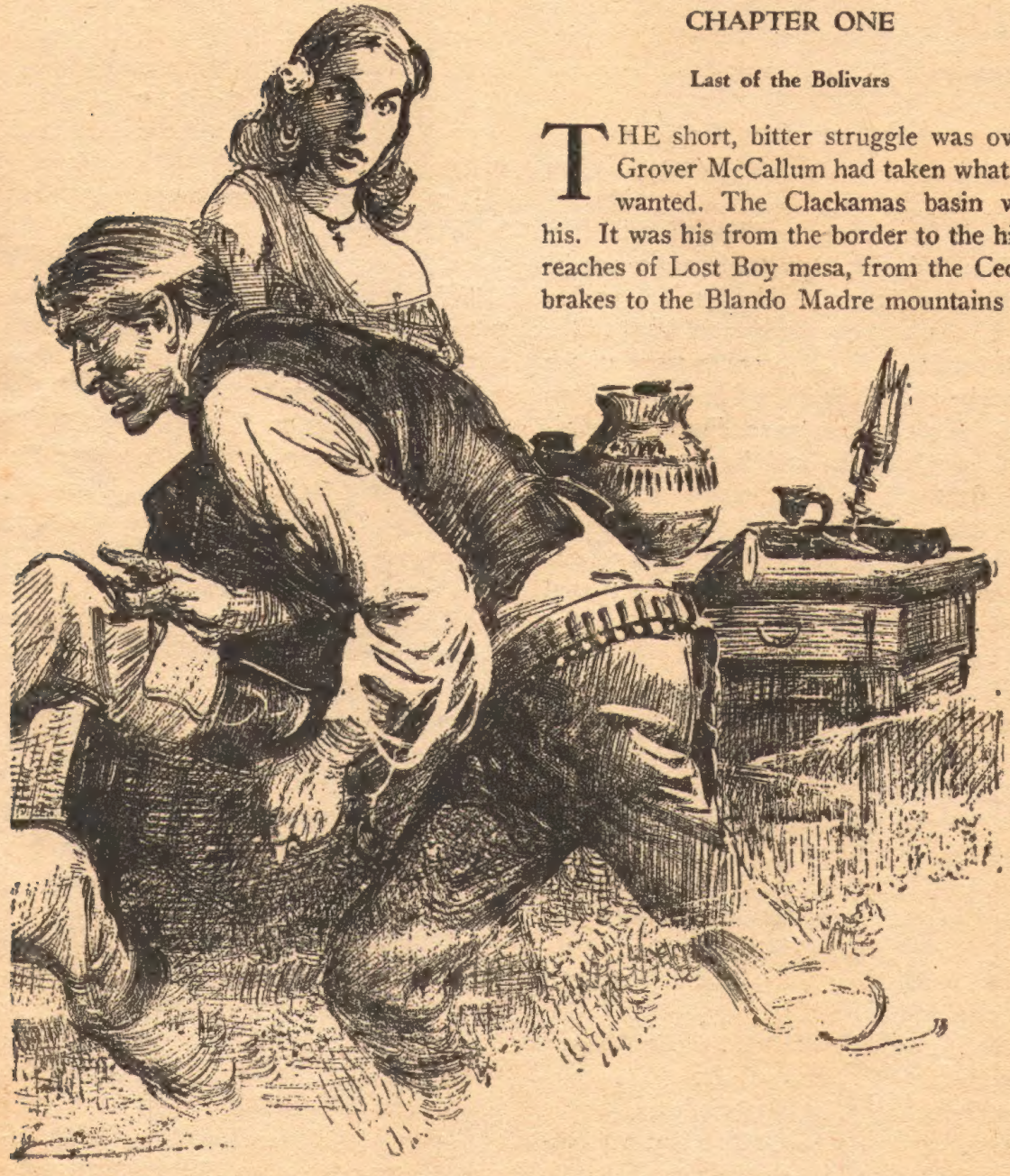
Thrill-Filled Range War Novelette

Pressler dropped his gun and clawed at the knife in his chest.

THE CLACKAMAS •

By Philip Ketchum

The charred ranch that had held the last of the Bolivars told McCallum that no one now could dispute his claim to the Basin. . . . No one, that is, except the eerie rider who struck so silently from the dark!



CHAPTER ONE

Last of the Bolivars

THE short, bitter struggle was over. Grover McCallum had taken what he wanted. The Clackamas basin was his. It was his from the border to the high reaches of Lost Boy mesa, from the Cedar brakes to the Blando Madre mountains on

the east. The one man who had challenged his claim of ownership was dead. His sons were dead with him. Those who had supported old Dan Bolivar had fled, or had quickly changed their loyalties.

McCallum could now build up the kind of an empire he had always wanted. He had here more than a million acres of rich pasture land. The cattle market was booming. It was a short drive to the railhead. This was his beginning. In a few more years he could extend his holdings beyond the basin. There was no limit to the possibilities which lay ahead.

The Bolivars had made their last stand in their ranch house on Lost Boy mesa. It had been a hopeless fight. They had stubbornly refused to surrender and face the trial McCallum had offered, a trial in a court he would have set up. Old Dan Bolivar, his three sons, and one hired man, loyal to the end, had died in the burning ruins of the ranch house. Their charred bodies had been buried in a common grave. Four of McCallum's men had been buried at the same time. The fight had not been entirely one-sided.

In the cold, gray light of the morning, Grover McCallum viewed the still-smoldering ruins of the ranch house, then turned aside to where his men had started a campfire and prepared coffee.

He accepted a cup from Lou Pressler and stood drinking it. He was a short man, slender. He stood very straight on heels built up to add an extra inch to his stature. He was close to fifty but he seemed younger. His hair was still dark and in his posture there was no hint of any weariness. He had a thin, tight-skinned face, eyes which were black and sharp and which may have reflected the driving ambition and the impatience which cursed him.

He finished his coffee and handed the cup back to Pressler. His eyes circled the group near the campfire, resting briefly on Hondo, Cam Willowby, Jake Orphan and the others, one by one. These were his men but he felt no comradeship with them. They were men he had hired, men he would use as he saw fit, just as he had used them tonight. They were fighters, mercenaries. He didn't have to like them. He bought and paid for their loyalty.

"You have done well," said McCallum bluntly. "There will be a half month's bonus for each of you next payday. On the way back to the ranch we'll stop at the Mexican settlement on the Clackamas."

No one made any comment. The men around the campfire stared at McCallum as blankly as he stared at them, and with as little friendship. McCallum turned away. He walked to where his horse was tied and swung into the saddle.

Lou Pressler mounted and joined him. "What do we do about the Mexicans?" he asked.

"We give them ten days to pack up and get back across the border," McCallum answered.

"And if they don't move?"

"We run them out."

Lou Pressler shrugged his shoulders. He would mind that less than this fight with the Bolivars. Mexicans, to Lou Pressler, were unimportant.

"There is a girl in that settlement," said Grover McCallum, his voice very casual. "Her name is Rosita Vargas. Do you know her?"

Pressler lifted his hand to cover the smirk which came to his face. He nodded his head.

"I want her taken to the old house," said McCallum carefully. "I don't want her harmed. I want her held there for me. I have a debt to pay that girl and I pay my debts. Maybe you had better handle this yourself with some man you can trust. Say nothing to anyone else."

Again Lou Pressler nodded. He said, "Sure, chief. I'll take care of it tonight. Hondo can help me."

Grover McCallum glanced once more toward the smoking ruins. A brief, tight smile came to his lips. He lifted the reins, spoke

to his horse and started away. His men fell in behind him.

THE Mexican settlement on the Clackamas was very old. It had been here before there had been any cattle run in the basin, before the days of the Bolivars and McCallum. This country had then been a part of Mexico. That it now wasn't, few of these people knew or cared. Politics and boundaries meant very little to them. Theirs had been a simple, agrarian life for more than three generations.

The Mexicans called their settlement Rio Verde. It consisted of thirty-odd adobe huts, a store, a cantina, and a church. The fields these people worked hugged the river. Cattle sometimes intruded after the Bolivars moved into the basin and settled on Lost Boy mesa, but by agreement with the Bolivars, such cattle were driven off. The people of Rio Verde had had no trouble with the Bolivars.

With the advent of Grover McCallum, conditions had changed. McCallum's men had occasionally come to the cantina. There had been several fights between them and the men of Rio Verde. Manuel Moncado, the Alcalde, had promised to talk to McCallum and ask him to keep his men away, but Moncado was an old man and had put off the long trip to the McCallum ranch.

McCallum's ultimatum came as a stunning blow to the men of Rio Verde. It was delivered to the Alcalde at his home. McCallum had no command of the Mexican language. He said what he had to say in English. Lou Pressler translated for him.

"You are trespassers," stated McCallum. "You are citizens of Mexico. This is the United States. You have no right to be here. The land you occupy belongs to me. If you are not gone in ten days, I shall see that you are moved forcibly across the border."

Manuel Moncado at first could think of no answer. When he did speak it was in a rambling and confused manner. He talked of how long his people had been here. He talked of crops not yet harvested. Pressler translated.

"To hell with all that," McCallum snapped. "Tell him again. Tell him to get his people out of here in ten days or we move them out. We will bring in troops, if necessary. Tell him, and let's ride on."

Lou Pressler gave Moncado the order once more, not forgetting to add the threat of troops. He had to laugh at the bewildered, frightened look on the Alcalde's face.

WHEN Sam Bolivar was ten years old, his father, in a fit of anger, had thrashed him. He had used a blacksnake whip. The whip had brought blood gushing from cuts on Sam's legs but no cry of pain came from his lips. Pale-faced, defiant, he had taken his punishment.

This silent, almost arrogant defiance of his father and a stubborn rebellion against any kind of control was the early and continuing pattern of Sam's life. Old Dan Bolivar never understood his youngest son. Sam's mother had died when he was born, and Dan, for a good many years, could not forgive Sam for causing her death. He would have nothing to do with Sam as a baby. He didn't seem to care whether Sam lived or died. This early hatred which his father held for him, undoubtedly had its influence on Sam's life. It was probably responsible for his defiance and his eternal rebellion.

As he grew older, Sam fell into the habit of leaving home for long stretches of time. Dan tried to stop this but without success. Where his son went on these trips Dan could only guess. Often it was into the Blanco Madre mountains. Twice it was down into Mexico. His companion, when Sam was in his late teens, was a Yaqui Indian lad named Ty-chee. They grew to be almost inseparable. Dan once said that Sam had become more Indian than white. At twenty, at the time of the trouble with McCallum, he was thin, tall, deeply bronzed,

and walked with the silent, panther-like tread of the Indian.

He wore moccasins in preference to boots. He rode his horses bareback, never using a saddle. He could draw his gun with a blinding speed, could shoot it accurately, but was equally fast with a knife.

Sam, in many ways, was hardly one of the Bolivars, yet when the last fight started he took his place with his father and brothers and the two hired men who hadn't fled. Quite early in that fight a bullet creased Sam's skull and he lost consciousness. Just before the end, Old Dan Bolivar carried him out the back door and down into the almost adjoining root cellar. Dan hid him there, and afterwards returned to the house for his final defiant stand. Dan's last coherent thought was a hope that Sam might escape and get back to the mountains he loved.

The fight and the fire were long over before Sam Bolivar recovered consciousness. He awoke to a hammering pain in his head and without knowledge of where he was or what had happened. Then he remembered the beginning of the fight. He sat up. It was dark and cool in the root cellar. The smell of the place identified it for him, but there was no explanation as to why or how he had come here. He got to his feet, made his way to the door, opened it and climbed the boarded stairs. He stared wide-eyed at the scene before him.

Never, so long as he lived, would Sam Bolivar forget this moment, or the shock that it brought him. Here and there, timbers were still smoking. A few remained upright, gaunt, blackened reminders of a once proud home. The destruction was complete. Even before he found the graves Sam knew that his father and brothers were dead.

Sam Bolivar had learned sign reading from the Indians. It took him only a short time to reconstruct what had happened after the fire. He could tell where the ruins had been searched and how the bodies had been dragged on blankets to the grave. The mark of the breakfast fire was there and he could see that McCallum and his men had ridden off in the direction of Rio Verde. The one thing the signs did not tell him was that one of the hired men had been identified as Sam Bolivar.

He had fastened a crude bandage over his head. He had his knife but no gun. Early in the afternoon he caught one of the horses which had not strayed far from the open corral, and mounted on this horse he started for Rio Verde. He had as yet formulated no plans. This disaster had dazed him and the throbbing pain still in his head was not conducive to clear thought. He headed for Rio Verde because he had friends there and because it was closer than the Yaqui village in the Blanco Madre mountains.

MANY of those in Rio Verde would not believe the Alcalde's story of what Grover McCallum had ordered. Some believed it but were sure McCallum could not have meant it. A few were not surprised. There was no general meeting that night but men gathered in small groups at the store, the cantina and in homes. There was talk of rebellion against the order, some of it real, particularly upon the part of the young men.

Two of McCallum's riders had stopped by at the cantina in the early evening and had discussed the fight on Lost Boy mesa. Juan Vargas, the cripple who tended bar, had overheard what they said. His story had immediately ended the hopes of those who had looked to the Bolivars for help.

After the cantina closed, Juan Vargas walked home with his sister, Rosita. Tonight, Rosita was very silent. Juan understood. Not only did she, with the others, face the threat of having to move, but word of what had happened to the Bolivars had hit her pretty hard. Juan had never been sure of the exact relationship between his sister and Sam Bolivar. He knew she liked

him. He sometimes suspected that she loved him. Rosita was hard to understand. She had a fiery temper. She could be gentle one minute, stormy the next.

One night in the cantina where she sometimes sang, she had flirted outrageously with McCallum, then had turned on him and slapped his face. She had slapped him hard enough to knock him down. McCallum had never returned to the cantina.

"Why did you do it?" Juan had asked. "Why did you flirt with him?"

Rosita had laughed. "Sam said Señor McCallum was a bad man. I wanted to find out. Sam was right."

It was a dark evening. Low hanging clouds hid the stars. There were few lights, this late, in any of the houses. Juan and his sister lived near the edge of the village. As they neared it, a man stopped them. Where he had come from Juan didn't know. He seemed to materialize from the shadows.

"Sam!" Rosita whispered. "Sam!"

She threw herself into the man's arms. Sam caught and held her. "Quiet, *querido,*" he said under his breath. "Quiet. You have visitors waiting in your home. Perhaps unwelcome visitors."

Juan Vargas stiffened. He peered closely at Sam Bolivar. Sam was wearing no hat. Something was tied around his head, a bandage, but Juan didn't know what it was.

"You are alive," Rosita whispered. "Those men were wrong. They boasted you were dead."

Sam's chuckle had a dry, mirthless sound. He still held Rosita in his arms. He looked over at Juan. "There are two men," he said slowly. "They wait in the darkness of the front room."

"Who are they?" Juan asked.

"Two men who work for Grover McCallum."

"I know of no reason why they should be there," said Juan, half angrily. "Wait here with Rosita. I will see what they want."

He started limping forward. Rosita caught her breath. She pulled away from Sam. She started after her brother but Sam caught her. "I'll be near him, Rosita," he whispered. "It must be done this way. We must learn what they want."

Juan Vargas was still angry when he reached the house. He entered the darkened room. He heard no sounds. He had the sudden feeling that Sam Bolivar must have been wrong about the men but when he struck a match and lit the lamp he saw them, standing together at the back of the room, each covering him with a gun. He recognized them at once. Lou Pressler and Hondo had been to the cantina on many evenings. They looked at him, then looked toward the door as though expecting someone else.

Pressler stepped forward. "Where is she, Juan?" he asked sharply. "Where is Rosita?"

Juan moistened his lips. "She is away. She is visiting with friends up the river."

"You lie," Pressler grated. "She was at the cantina tonight. I saw her through the window."

"What do you want with her?" Juan asked.

"The chief wants her," Pressler replied. "Play this right and you can make a good thing out of it. Where is she?"

Juan Vargas stiffened. He shook his head. "I cannot tell you."

An ugly look came into Pressler's face. He moved forward again. Hondo crowded up behind him. "Where is she?" Pressler roared. "Tell me where she is!"

Sam Bolivar stepped into the doorway. "Would I do, instead, Pressler?" he asked quietly.

PRESSLER'S head jerked around. A startled, almost terrified look came into his eyes. Here was a dead man, a man from the grave! A blood-soaked bandage was still wrapped around his head. For an instant every muscle in Pressler's body was paralyzed. And then he moved, his gun swinging desperately toward the man who

stood looking at him from the doorway.

Sam Bolivar's hand whipped up, back and forward. The knife he was holding streaked across the room. He heard the roar of Pressler's shot but the bullet was wide. Pressler staggered backwards against Hondo. He dropped his gun. He clawed at the knife in his chest. A thin scream arose from his throat.

Sam was lunging forward. Hondo, twisting away from Pressler, tried to center his gun. A fist exploded in his face. He reeled backwards under another blow. He tripped and sprawled to the floor.

Sam stooped over him, pulled him erect. He stabbed at Hondo's face. He drove the man against the wall, rocking him backwards with one fist and then with another. There was no mercy in him. Here was one of the men who had participated in the murders on Lost Boy mesa and who tonight would have kidnapped Rosita. He was not entitled to live.

Hondo's body sagged against the wall. His knees folded. He slid to the floor. He rolled half over on his face.

Sam stepped back. He stared at Hondo, then turned and stared at the quiet, motionless figure of Lou Pressler. Rosita, from the doorway, looked at him with wide, startled eyes. Even Juan Vargas seemed startled.

"Stay outside for a minute," Sam said to Rosita. "If anyone comes, send them away. Tell them the gun shots were accidental."

Rosita nodded. She stepped back and closed the door. Sam glanced toward the windows. Both were curtained. He made a brief examination of Lou Pressler, and knew that there was nothing to be done for him.

"Find something and tie Hondo up," he said to Juan Vargas. "Gag him, too."

"A knife would be simpler," Juan suggested.

Sam shook his head. "Tie him up."

"They would have taken Rosita," Juan said slowly. "Is there no way to stop this man McCallum?"

Sam made no answer.

"We have been ordered to leave. All of us. Everyone in Rio Verde. We have been told we do not belong here. McCallum has threatened to bring in troops if we do not leave. What can we do, Sam?"

"You can do what I am going to do," Sam said slowly. "You can fight him."

"How? We are farmers. There are women and children to be considered. Many of those in Rio Verde are old."

"There are many ways to fight," Sam answered. "Some battles cannot be won with only a gun and a knife."

"Tell me what we can do."

Sam Bolivar pulled in a long, slow breath. His mind was beginning to work again. The fight was not over. The Bolivars had lost, but the people of Rio Verde were still here. He could cast his lot with them. They might not be fighters as McCallum reckoned men, but McCallum could be wrong.

"What can we do?" Juan Vargas asked once more.

Sam started pacing restlessly back and forth across the floor. He started talking, slowly at first, then more rapidly as his ideas began to take form. Rosita came into the room, but he hardly glanced at her. There was a chance to whip McCallum. He could see it. A thin chance, but it was worth trying.

CHAPTER TWO

The Hostages

THE following night was clear and warm. Juan drove the wagon. Rosita was on the seat beside him. They stopped at a point about half a mile from the McCallum ranch house and off to the side of the road near a grove of trees. Sam Bolivar had told them to wait here.

Rosita was tense with excitement. She stared ahead. "Juan," she whispered.

"There may be trouble. It may not work out as he thought. Perhaps we should drive closer."

Juan Vargas shook his head. "Sam said to wait here."

The girl bit her lips. She looked around at the three saddled horses which were tied to the wagon's tail-gate. "If we have the wagon," she asked, "why do we need the horses?"

Juan shrugged his shoulders. This detail of the plan Sam hadn't explained to him.

Rosita grasped his arm. "Listen," she said tensely. "What was that?"

Juan leaned forward and strained his ears up. He could hear nothing but the singing of the wind in the trees overhead.

* * *

Sam Bolivar crouched in the shadow of the McCallum ranch house. He had been here more than an hour. He had made friends with two dogs, and had overheard McCallum questioning his men about Lou Pressler, and later had overheard a brief and bitter quarrel between McCallum and his wife. He had seen Dorothy McCallum come in from a short evening ride with Cam Willowby, one of her father's men. Dorothy had been laughing. Cam Willowby had been glum and silent.

McCallum, his wife and his daughter were now in the ranch house parlor. McCallum's men were in the bunkhouse where the routine, evening poker game had started. It was near ten.

To the left of the barn a faint glow lifted into the sky. At first it was hardly discernible but suddenly it spread, outlining a cluster of haystacks. The glow brightened. At its base there appeared red, licking flames. Pedro Cos, one of Juan's friends, had done his work.

A cry of alarm echoed from the bunkhouse. Men rushed into the yard. McCallum joined them. He started shouting orders. The haystacks reached close to the barn. If the fire wasn't blocked off, the barn might go. McCallum's men had work to do.

Sam Bolivar moved closer to the house. He came to a side door. He tried it. The door was not locked. He opened it and stepped inside. He crossed a narrow room to another door, slowly turned the knob and pulled the door open. He stood now looking into the parlor. Across the room at the window was Dorothy McCallum. She was watching the fire. Where her mother was, Sam didn't know.

He hesitated for a moment, then moved swiftly forward. His moccasined feet made no sound on the carpeted floor. He came up behind Dorothy McCallum. He clasped one hand over her mouth and another around her body. Her scream was stifled. She struggled to free herself as Sam pulled her back across the room but Sam's arms were like steel bands.

Outside the house, he paused, "If you don't struggle or call for help," he promised, "I will release you. I'm taking you to some friends of mine. Will you walk?"

He eased his grip. Dorothy made no outcry. She wiped her hand across her mouth. She turned to stare at him, and in the reflected light from the burning haystacks she could see him quite clearly. Her lips formed his name but no sound came from her throat.

"Straight down the road," Sam ordered. "And don't shout for help. No one could get here in time to save you."

Dorothy McCallum stiffened. She was a tall, slender girl. She was proud, wilful, with some of her father's arrogance.

"You will pay for this, Sam Bolivar," she said angrily. "You'll be sorry for this night's work as long as you live."

"Start down the road," Sam answered. "I'm not sorry yet."

DOROTHY McCALLUM headed down the road. She held her head very erect. Her hands were clenched at her sides. She

fairly seethed with anger and she showed it.

Rosita and Juan Vargas met them near the grove. Dorothy stared at these two. She said nothing.

"You'll have to watch her," Sam warned. "Don't trust her for a minute."

"We will watch her," Juan promised. "Must you go back, Sam?"

Sam Bolivar nodded. He hurried up the road. The fire was still blazing high but McCallum and his men had widened a break between the haystacks and the barn. Sam knew he didn't have much time to finish the task he had set himself.

He entered the McCallum house by the same door he had used before and as he reached the parlor Mrs. McCallum came in from the yard. She was calling Dorothy's name. She was a thin, frail woman with stringy grey hair. Her eyes had a tired look. She started for one of the bedroom doors. She didn't see Sam Bolivar.

"Were you looking for Dorothy?" Sam asked.

Mrs. McCallum stopped. She turned to face him, her hands lifting to her throat.

"I can take you to her," Sam said quietly.

"Who—who are you?" Mrs. McCallum asked.

"Sam Bolivar. Dorothy is outside with some friends of mine. She is going away with us. Do you want to go along?"

Mrs. McCallum's hands had dropped from her throat. She was twisting them together, nervously. She seemed to be trying to read something in the expression on Sam's face. She was slow in making her answer but Sam knew what her answer would be. In spite of whatever fears she might have, she would go with him. She was Dorothy's mother. She could not refuse to go. She nodded her head.

Sam could hear voices outside near the barn. McCallum's men were still fighting the fire. His eyes circled the room. "Go out through the side door," he said to Mrs. McCallum. "Wait for me near the house. If you call your husband you will never see Dorothy again."

"Shouldn't I—take something?" Mrs. McCallum asked.

"No. There isn't time."

Mrs. McCallum bit her lips. She turned toward the door. After she was gone, Sam Bolivar started for the bedrooms. He was beginning to feel the pressure of time. He worked swiftly, passing from one room to another. As he stood in the kitchen he heard McCallum's voice in the front room. McCallum was shouting for Sarah, and suddenly his tones lifted in a cry of alarm.

Sam left the house by the kitchen door. He moved quickly to where Sarah McCallum was waiting. He led her toward the road, almost running. As they came to the road Mrs. McCallum looked back. She stopped. "You set fire to the house," she said quietly. "Why?"

"Your husband," Sam answered, "set fire to the Bolivar ranch house. My father and my brothers were inside. At least you and Dorothy will not burn to death."

McCallum was summoning his men from the barn. Flames were already licking through the windows of the ranch house. The glow from the fire reached almost to the road. Sam took Mrs. McCallum's arm. "Come on," he ordered. "We have a long way to go."

"I can walk without any help, young man," said Mrs. McCallum testily.

She pulled free. She stalked down the road ahead of him, her back very straight.

GROVER McCALLUM moved his headquarters to the old house where he and Sarah and Dorothy had lived when they first came to the Clackamas basin. The old house was five miles from the new one which had been almost completely destroyed by the fire. It was to this old house that he had asked Lou Pressler to bring Rosita. Pressler had failed to bring her and was mysteriously unaccounted for. That, however, wasn't so important. Only one thing

mattered to Grover McCallum. What had happened to Sarah and Dorothy? Were they alive? And if they were alive, where were they? Grover McCallum was a little surprised at his concern over what had happened to his wife. He had been tired of her for a long time, or at least he had thought he had been tired of her.

A crowd of men rode into the yard. McCallum heard them. He stepped to the door. These were the men who had followed the trail of the wagon which had stopped near the ranch house on the night of the fire. The women were not with them.

Jake Orphan, a huge black-bearded fellow, dismounted and came up to the porch. There was a puzzled look in Orphan's eyes.

"We followed that wagon trail twenty miles across country, chief," Orphan reported. "The wagon didn't go anyplace. We found it on the flats below the mesa. The team had been unhitched. One horse was about half a mile away. The other, I reckon, was ridden off by the man who drove the wagon."

"There was no sign of the women?"

"We found this on the seat of the wagon," said Jake Orphan.

He drew a scarf from his pocket. He handed it to McCallum. It was one of Sarah's scarfs. McCallum held it in his hands. His lips tightened.

"This was on the wagonseat, too," Orphan continued. "It was held there by a rock. You can believe what it says if you want to. I happen to know he's dead."

Orphan was holding out a folded piece of paper. McCallum took it. He opened it and read the scrawled message.

McCallum—'An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. A life for a life.' Dig where you see the crosses!

Sam Bolivar.

McCallum's hands started shaking. He read the message again. He stared at the signature. It wasn't possible, he knew. Sam Bolivar was dead. All the Bolivars were dead. He had seen their charred bodies. He had seen them buried.

"He's dead," Jake Orphan growled. "Someone else is using his name."

"Who?" McCallum asked.

"One of the Mexicans from Rio Verde."

McCallum couldn't believe that. But there was nothing else he could believe. There could be no other answer.

"Cam Willowby set off on the trail of the man who had driven the wagon," Orphan mentioned. "It led toward the Blando Madre mountains. I figure he's wasting his time. The women never were in that wagon. It was a blind."

McCallum hardly heard what Orphan was saying. He looked again at the note. He said under his breath, *"Dig where you see the crosses."*

"What's the matter, chief?" asked Jake Orphan.

McCallum was staring past the man, staring toward the crest of a low hill. Clearly visible, on that hill, was a crude wooden cross. McCallum had noticed it early this morning. He had wondered, casually, who had put it there and why. He wasn't casual about it now.

"Get a shovel," he said thickly. "Come with me."

McCallum mounted one of the still-saddled horses. He rode toward the crest of the hill followed by Jake Orphan and these other men who had just returned to the ranch. Where the cross was planted he swung to the ground. Here was a mound of fresh earth. Here was a grave.

"Dig!" McCallum ordered, and his voice was harsh and brittle. "Dig, but dig carefully."

He couldn't endure watching. He turned away as Jake Orphan set to work. He stood with his hands clenched at his sides. The grave was shallow. It was not empty. McCallum knew that by what he heard. Perspiration gathered on his face.

"It's Lou Pressler, chief," called one of the men.

McCallum knew a sudden, deep relief. Lou Pressler! He cared nothing for Lou Pressler. He cared nothing for a hundred men like Lou Pressler. He started toward his horse but as he reached it his body grew rigid. There might be another cross somewhere. Almost against his will his eyes searched these rolling hills. He didn't see any other cross anywhere. But tomorrow he might. A shudder ran over his body.

THE night was half dark. Scudding clouds blotted out part of the stars and occasionally hid the high, thin, crescent shaped moon. Sam Bolivar sat in the deep shelter of the trees bordering Deer creek at a point a mile below the old McCallum ranch house. To his left the night birds suddenly hushed their twittering. Sam Bolivar grinned. He listened intently for some tell-tale sound but none reached him.

"All right, Ty-chee," he said suddenly. "You're making as much noise as a cow. Come on out in the open."

A figure rose up from the ground, almost at his side. "I made no noise at all," said Ty-chee in an aggrieved voice.

Sam chuckled. "The night birds stopped their singing."

Ty-chee squatted down near him. The Indian wore old, ragged trousers and a shirt which had been stained brown by berry juice. His hair was black, shoulder length, parted in the middle and bound close to his head by a leather thong. He was short, stocky, and had wide, powerful shoulders. He carried a knife in his waistband.

"McCallum has two guards posted outside the ranch house," said Ty-chee. "They are dull-witted men."

"You had trouble?"

"There are no night birds near the ranch house," Ty-chee answered.

Sam Bolivar laughed. He said, "Tell me what you learned, Ty-chee."

"They ride to Rio Verde in the morning. McCallum is sure his wife and daughter were taken by men from Rio Verde. He said to a man named Orphan that he would destroy the town if necessary in order to find the women."

Sam nodded. He had anticipated something like this. The people of Rio Verde were the only ones on whom McCallum could spend his anger. It was not hard to guess what might happen tomorrow. McCallum could be ruthless. A good many innocent and helpless people would suffer.

"There are only two guards," Sam muttered.

"Only two," said the Indian.

"There are two of us."

Ty-chee nodded.

"If McCallum's horses should break out of the corral and drift into the hills, McCallum and his men could not ride to Rio Verde, tomorrow."

"That is true," said Ty-chee, gravely.

Sam Bolivar glanced toward the Indian. Ty-chee was grinning.

WILL HERNDON made another trip around the ranch house. He could see nothing in the deep shadows beyond it. He heard no sounds which needed explaining. The night was chilly. The wind knifed persistently through his coat. Herndon was cold and uncomfortable. This notion of standing guard against the ghost of a dead man, in his opinion, was foolish. McCallum, who had always seemed like a man of steel, seemed to be getting jittery. Herndon had only one thing for which he could be thankful tonight. He had drawn the first watch. At midnight he would be relieved.

As he came to the back of the house he caught a glimpse of Mike Patch in the light from one of the bunkhouse windows. Mike had the barn, bunkhouse and corral to patrol. Herndon backed up against the house. He rolled and lit a cigarette and stood there, smoking it. He decided to make one more trip around the house and then stop in the kitchen and see if the coffee pot was still on the stove. He started off, rounded the corner of the house, neared

the front porch. Pain suddenly exploded in his head. He realized, in a confused way, that someone had come up behind him and slugged him. He tried desperately to reach his gun but before his hand could close on it all conscious memory faded away.

Sam Bolivar slid his gun back into its holster. He lifted Herndon into his arms, walked to the back of the house, hesitated there for a moment then crossed to the barn. As he moved inside he heard Ty-chee's voice. "What took you so long?" Ty-chee was asking. "There was only one man at the house."

"He stopped to smoke a cigarette," Sam growled.

He lowered Herndon's body to the barn floor. Ty-chee had a length of rope in his hands. He stooped over Herndon. He tied the man's arms and legs, gagged him, and then rolled him over to where Mike Patch was lying, similarly bound and gagged.

Sam Bolivar moved to the barn door. He started outside then came to an abrupt stop, his hand dropping to his gun. The ranch house door had opened. McCallum was there, outlined against the lamp light behind him.

He stood there for a long time, peering into the yard. Sam could feel a sharp tension building up in his body. He was sure McCallum would notice his guards had disappeared but someone in the house yelled his name and McCallum turned back inside, closing the door.

"It might be well to delay no longer," whispered Ty-chee.

Sam Bolivar nodded. They stepped outside, circled to the far end of the corral, and set to work. This was a split-rail corral. It took only a few minutes to open three sections. A few minutes more and the corral was empty.

TEN miles up the Clackamas river from Rio Verde, and to the west, were rolling hills covered with jack pine and piñon. In a fold of these hills, the people from Rio Verde had made their camp, some pitching makeshift tents, some fashioning brush and bough shelters. A common kitchen had been established but there was to be no cooking except at night when the smoke would not be seen.

Only a few men and women had remained in the village, and those by design. This flight to the hills had been well organized. McCallum would find little upon which to vent his anger when he reached Rio Verde. He could not burn the adobe houses.

In one of the camp shelters, Sam Bolivar had slept for twenty hours while various volunteers stood watch, driving away the curious and noisy children. He was still sleeping and it was Pedro Cos who sat near the shelter when Rosita came up.

"She wants to see him," said Rosita. "The young one. She demands that she see him. I would like to pull her hair out."

Pedro laughed softly. "She is beautiful. Does that worry you?"

"She is not beautiful," Rosita answered. "She is cold. Her nose is pointed."

"But Señor Bolivar may think she is beautiful."

Rosita's eyes flashed angrily. "If he does I shall pull out *his* hair."

The murmur of this conversation reached through the foggy haze of Sam's waking moments. He rolled over on his back. He stretched, aware of a stiffness in his muscles and of a weariness which reached every part of his body. It was late afternoon. Sam had not meant to sleep so long. He stared up through the leafy branches, already conscious of the anxieties which had been with him before this rest. He had led these people here. It was on his insistence that they had left their homes. He had made them partner to whatever fate awaited him, and this responsibility was a heavy burden on his mind.

Sam threw off the blanket which covered him. He sat up and at the sound of this movement, Pedro Cos joined him. Pedro

was short, stocky, middle-aged. He had dark, thick hair.

"Where is Ty-chee?" Sam asked.

"I do not know," said Pedro Cos. "He has gone. He said you were to await him."

"What word is there from Rio Verde?"

"Senor McCallum is there. He rode into the village this morning. There were fifteen men with him. If he has left we have not heard."

Sam nodded. He rubbed his jaw. He badly needed a shave. A bath, too, would have been welcome. He wondered what had happened or what was happening in Rio Verde.

"Rosita says the McCallum woman wants to talk with you. The young one."

Sam nodded. A small stream half-circled this camping place. He headed toward it. He had a long drink. He bathed his face in its cool waters. Several children playing in the stream stared at him with round, curious eyes, then went on with their games. A brief smile touched Sam's lips. The children, at least, didn't mind what was happening. To them it was an adventure.

As he turned back up the trail he saw Rosita waiting for him. She was a short, slender girl. The top of her head came barely to Sam's shoulder. Sam regarded her gravely. Sometimes he thought he knew Rosita very well. At other times he couldn't understand her at all. She could be tender or violent. She could act like a mischievous boy or like a woman in whom reposed all the wisdom of her sex. He never knew what mood he would find her in. It occurred to him suddenly that these changeable characteristics might be one of the attractions she held for him. Rosita was many girls in one.

"You are going to see the McCallum woman?" Rosita asked.

Sam nodded.

Rosita shrugged her shoulders indifferently. A frown came to her face. "Juan is gone," she told him.

"Where?"

"Last night Maria Gomez could not be found. Her parents had thought she was with the Cordobas. She wasn't. A search was made of the camp. No one had seen Maria. Juan and Sergio Gomez went back to Rio Verde to find her. They have not returned."

"Perhaps they are hiding," Sam suggested. "Perhaps they will return after dark."

Rosita bit her lips. "McCallum is in Rio Verde. Juan is there. If he is found—" She didn't finish the sentence.

"If they don't show up," Sam promised, "Ty-chee and I will go after them. Where will I find Dorothy McCallum?"

"I will show you," said Rosita.

THE two women prisoners were held in a shelter in the center of the camp. They stood up as Sam Bolivar approached. Dorothy's copperish hair was braided and circled her head. Her lips were pressed tightly together. Angry lights showed in her eyes. Her mother looked tired but smiled faintly as Sam came up. She nodded her head. Dorothy neither smiled nor nodded.

"I'm sorry you have been inconvenienced," said Sam Bolivar. "It couldn't be helped. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"You can give us horses," said Dorothy McCallum, "and an escort home."

"Later." Sam grinned.

Dorothy stamped her foot. "Now!"

The grin on Sam Bolivar's face widened. He shook his head.

"You will be hanged for this," said Dorothy McCallum. "When it happens I shall be there cheering."

"Would you like to hold the rope?" Sam asked.

Dorothy stepped forward. She lifted her hand. She slapped at Sam's face but Sam caught her wrist and held it, laughing. He said, "Grow up, Dorothy. Take it like your mother."

The girl pulled away. Sam let her go. Her face was flushed. Tears brimmed her

eyes. "It isn't fair," she cried. "What have we done? What have we done?"

"Why nothing," Sam answered. "And you're being treated very well." He turned to face Mrs. McCallum. "Is there anything you wish?"

Mrs. McCallum nodded. "We should both like to go home as soon as we can."

Sam stared thoughtfully at this older woman, sensing the strength of her character and wondering at the great difference between her and the man she had married. He turned abruptly away.

CHAPTER THREE

Reunion in Rio Verde

THE home of the Alcalde was in the center of Rio Verde, near the cantina, the store and the church. Grover McCallum made this his headquarters. It was a three-room adobe house, a wide and long front room, behind this the bedroom, and behind the bedroom a kitchen. Nothing seemed to be missing from the Alcalde's home excepting the Alcalde and his family.

The same was true of the other homes McCallum had visited and of those places searched by his men. This seemed to make the story of those who were here, ridiculous. Five old men and three women had been questioned. All told the same story. All insisted that the people of Rio Verde had moved down river across the border, that there they were building a new village, and that when it was built, the furnishings left here would be moved. McCallum could not believe this. The story did not have a true ring. From the evidence at hand he was sure that the people who had left here had left in a hurry.

This was a time to curse his luck of an understanding of Spanish. He had questioned the people who had been found in Rio Verde through Jake Orphan and Russ Delany, neither of whom was a good linguist. If he could have asked his questions direct he was sure he could have forced more satisfactory answers.

McCallum had counted on finding some trace of his wife and daughter here in Rio Verde. That he hadn't, was a bitter disappointment. As it grew dark he paced back and forth across the hard earth floor of the Alcalde's home, searching his mind for some inspiration as to the next step to take. He didn't think that Sarah and his daughter were dead. Whoever had taken them, he was sure, still held them as hostages. The name of Sam Bolivar came to his lips. He shook his head. He still wouldn't believe that any of the Bolivars had survived that fire on the mesa.

"When are we going to get out of here?" asked Jake Orphan from the doorway.

"We're not going to get out," McCallum answered. "We're going to stay here a while."

"The men won't like it," Orphan frowned.

"They're paid to like it."

"They still won't like it."

A sudden spatter of gunfire interrupted McCallum's answer. It seemed to come from the north end of the village. Jake Orphan stiffened. He clawed up his gun.

"Go see what that is," McCallum snapped. "Get right back here."

Jake Orphan threw McCallum an ugly look. He stepped outside. He was gone about fifteen minutes. When he returned Cam Willowby and Will Herndon were with him. Three prisoners marched into the room ahead of them. Two were men. One was a girl of about eight. The girl was frightened. She was crying. One of the men limped as he came into the room. The other man had a light scalp wound.

"Where did you get these men?" McCallum asked.

"We caught them trying to sneak out of the village," Willowby replied. "There was a third man who got away."

McCallum stared at the younger of the two men, suddenly recognizing him as one

of the bartenders at the cantina and the brother of Rosita. This reminded him of his orders to Lou Pressler and Hondo. Pressler was dead. Hondo had disappeared. This lame fellow, Juan Vargas, undoubtedly could tell plenty if he could be made to talk. McCallum rubbed his hands together. Here was something to get to work on. Here was a chance to break through the dark curtain which had settled over the Clackamas basin.

TY-CHEE reached the camp two hours before midnight. One of the guards stationed some distance away walked in with him. Most of the camp was asleep but Sam Bolivar, seated near the creek with Rosita, heard them coming and called to them. The guard returned to his station. Ty-chee squatted down near Sam and the girl.

"You have been to Rio Verde?" said Rosita, leaning forward. "Where is my brother?"

Ty-chee frowned. He was not a man who could be hurried. What he had to say, he would say in his own way.

"There are fifteen men with McCallum," he mentioned. "They searched the village but they did not search it well. When they were sure it was deserted, they looked mostly for loot. They found little. They are still in the village. They will stay there the night."

"What of my brother, Ty-chee," Rosita insisted. "What of Maria and Sergio Gomez?"

Ty-chee's frown deepened. He gave Rosita a dark, angry look.

"Most of their horses," he continued, "are tied along the street, anyplace that is convenient. Most men are in the cantina. Perhaps they will even sleep there. McCallum is in the Alcalde's home. There are two guards in front of it, two in the rear. McCallum is taking no chances."

"My brother," Rosita demanded. "What of my brother?"

"I saw and talked to him," said Ty-chee finally. "He and the other man found the girl. They will wait until quite late before leaving. Some of McCallum's men still prowl the village."

Rosita sank back. A smile came briefly to her lips. "Thank you, Ty-chee."

Ty-chee got to his feet. He looked down at Sam. "I have something to show you," he said quietly.

Sam Bolivar nodded. He stood up, pulled Rosita up with him. He held her for a moment in his arms, marveling at how small she was and how yielding, but still aware of the fierce strength in her body. "Good night, *mi corazon*," he whispered. "Sleep well."

Ty-chee led him down creek. Below the camp, he stopped. "They are prisoners," he said bluntly. "I did not want to admit that to Rosita."

Sam Bolivar frowned. "Tell me about it."

"They were captured as they tried to leave Rio Verde, just after dark. They had hidden safely all day. The men who took them marched them to the Alcalde's home. McCallum questioned them. He had them bound. He used a whip—even on the little girl."

Sam caught his breath.

"Before this, they had refused to talk. When McCallum started on the girl, her father agreed to lead McCallum here. They will wait until dawn. If they made their attack in the darkness McCallum knows many of us might escape."

"Where are they held?" Sam asked.

"In the Alcalde's home. In the middle room. They are still bound. They are well guarded. I made sure of this before I left."

Sam Bolivar nodded. There were three obvious courses which he could follow. He could arouse the camp and those here could flee, but the trail they would leave could easily be followed and McCallum's men would travel fast. Or instead of this he could lead the men in this camp back to Rio Verde. McCallum's crowd could be

surrounded, could be wiped out. In such a battle, however, a good many of those he led might be killed. There was one other plan he could try. If the three prisoners should escape, McCallum would be unable to make his raid.

"Ty-chee," he said slowly. "I am going to Rio Verde. Perhaps I shall see McCallum. You wait here. When I return—"

Ty-chee was shaking his head. "Perhaps we shall both see this man McCallum, for I too am going to Rio Verde."

THE darkness was on their side. It pressed in on Rio Verde like a black fog, pushing back the fingers of light which tried to reach out through the cantina windows. The night was cold, too. The guards McCallum had posted had draped blankets over their shoulders. Those in front of the Alcalde's, and those in back, kept close together. Apparently they had not forgotten what had happened to Will Herndon and Mike Patch. They seemed to have no liking for this job. Sam had been close enough to them to hear them grumbling. They had peopled the deserted village with the ghosts of their imagination.

Sam Bolivar and Ty-chee stood in the darkness near the Alcalde's home. They had tried the windows of the middle room but the windows were latched. McCallum was still up. At the blanket-curtained front-room window, Sam had heard him roaring at one of his men. Any noise, any alarm would bring others charging from the cantina across the street.

"We could take the guards," Ty-chee whispered. "One from each side.

Sam Bolivar nodded. They were standing where they could see the front of the house. The door opened. Grover McCallum stepped outside, accompanied by two men.

He stood for a moment in the dim light from the room he had just left. Sam's hand closed on his gun, just as it had a few nights before when he had stood in the doorway of McCallum's barn. A shot, now, might end this trouble, or it might not. McCallum's men were still to be considered. This basin was a rich prize, one they wouldn't ride away from too quickly. Another consideration held him back. He wanted a chance to face McCallum, not just a chance at murder.

McCallum talked briefly to the guards in front of the house, then closed the door and with the two men who accompanied him, angled across the street toward the cantina. The three entered the cantina. This was more of a break than Sam had expected. Now he had only to get past the two guards in front of the house.

"McCallum may not stay long at the cantina," he whispered to Ty-chee. "We shall have to hurry. I will take the guard on this side."

Ty-chee nodded. "Wait for the sound of the cricket, then count to ten."

The Indian turned. He moved silently away through the darkness. Sam Bolivar headed toward the house. He reached it. He came to the front corner and edged around it, lying flat on the ground. His progress was now measured in inches. He could hear the murmuring voices of the two guards. They sat together on the step in front of the door, the blankets over their shoulders, their hands and arms hidden, two huddled figures trying to keep warm.

Sam drew slowly nearer to them, feeling ahead with the palms of his hands, lifting and propelling his body forward with his toes and arms. He made no sound at all. He had said to Ty-chee that they must hurry but a thing like this took time. Even one cry from either of these men might wreck whatever chance of success they had.

HE WAS close, now. So close that he could almost reach out and touch the man nearest him. The guards had stopped talking. One of them shifted restlessly, muttering profanely under his breath. Sam Bolivar lay motionless, waiting, listening.

The grating sound of a cricket reached his ears. Ty-chee was in place and ready.

Sam reached for his gun. His muscles bunched. He started counting. As he reached ten, he came swiftly to his feet, lunging forward. The guard nearest him, started to get up. The beginnings of a cry broke from his throat as Sam smashed down with his gun. The cry choked off. The man toppled forward.

Sam looked to where the other guard had been sitting. He was no longer there. Ty-chee stood up, a vague and indistinct figure in the darkness. The second guard lay at his feet.

"Back to the north window, Ty-chee," Sam ordered. "I will go through the house, free the prisoners and open the window. Be there to help them out."

Ty-chee nodded and turned away. Sam stepped inside and closed the door behind him. A lamp was still burning on a table half across the room. There was no one here. In the next room, two bound figures lay on straw pallets. Near one of them was the girl, Maria.

"Sam!" gasped Juan Vargas, "How—"

"We're getting out of here," Sam answered. "Ty-chee is waiting to help us."

He crossed to the north window, unlatched it and opened it. He turned back and stooped over Maria. The girl uttered a frightened cry. She tried to roll away from him.

"No, Maria," said her father. "He has come to help us. Go with him."

The girl still tried to shrink away as Sam picked her up. He carried her to the window and passed her through it into Ty-chee's waiting arms. He turned back to Juan Vargas and as he reached him he heard voices, high, excited voices from the front of the house. McCallum had returned and he was not alone. He had discovered the two unconscious guards.

"Get back to that room," he shouted to someone. "See if the prisoners are still there."

Footsteps were approaching the bedroom door. Sam Bolivar straightened. He would have no chance now to get these men out. They were still bound. The man heading for this room would be here before he could free them. His margin of time had not been wide enough—he was trapped. Sam moved swiftly to where the opening door would momentarily hide him. He stood there, tense, breathless, his hand on his gun. He kept his eyes on the door.

THE man who opened the door stood in it for a moment, before entering the room. He could see the figures of Juan Vargas and Sergio Gomez. Perhaps he didn't notice the open window or that the girl was missing. A bundle of blankets near Gomez might have looked like the girl.

"Bring me the lamp, Russ," he called over his shoulder. "It looks as though no one has been in here. We'll make sure."

The light reaching into the room grew stronger as Russ Delaney came forward with the lamp. The man in the doorway took it. He stepped forward, the lamp in one hand, his gun in the other. He looked toward the open window, his body suddenly rigid. He turned, then, and looked straight at Sam Bolivar.

"Well, how about it, Cam?" roared Grover McCallum.

Cam Willowby moistened his lips. He shook his head. "No one here, chief. We weren't over at the cantina for more than a few minutes. Whoever jumped those guards was scared off when we returned."

McCallum came up to the door. As he reached it, Willowby turned and held the lamp so that his body threw a wide shadow across the side of the room where the prisoners were lying and where the window was open. Perhaps the gun in Sam's hand was responsible for this. Perhaps Willowby was fighting desperately for a chance to walk out of here alive.

"Look in the kitchen," McCallum ordered.

Willowby moved on to the kitchen door. He stepped into the kitchen and away, now, from the menace of Sam's gun. Sam Bolivar waited tensely for his shout of warning, but it didn't come. Willowby returned after a moment, shaking his head.

"No one back there, chief," he reported. "I tell you, we scared them off."

As he said this he was heading straight across the bedroom, again holding the lamp so that his body threw its shadow on the prisoners. He looked once more, straight at Sam Bolivar. There was a cautioning message in his eyes, a message Sam couldn't understand.

"We scared them off, chief," he said again. "They didn't have time to break in here. I'm going to take a look outside."

"Don't be a fool," McCallum growled. "If they got two men right in front of this house, what chance would you have alone?"

"I'm still going to take a look," Willowby answered.

He was back in the front room, now, and again Sam was aware of the breathless tension which gripped him. Once more Willowby was safe. Once more he could tell what he had seen in the bedroom but for some strange reason of his own, he didn't. The door to the front room closed. Through it came the murmur of voices but no sound of excitement or alarm.

Sam Bolivar slid his gun back into its holster. He mopped a hand over his face. It came away, moist with perspiration. His knees were shaky as he moved forward, stooped over Juan Vargas and cut the bonds which held him.

"To the window, Juan," he whispered. "Wait there for me. Make no noise."

From Juan he stepped to where Sergio Gomez was lying. His knife slashed Sergio's bonds. He straightened up, listened. There was still no sound of alarm from the front room. The rasping voice of Grover McCallum was very distinct. McCallum

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had an argument on his hands. His men wanted to pull out. They had had enough of the ghosts of Rio Verde.

Sam moved toward the window. He leaned through it. He wispered Ty-chee's name.

"Right here," said the Indian.

Sam stepped back. He nudged Juan Vargas. Juan started to climb through the window. McCallum's voice was suddenly louder. It seemed to be just beyond the door. Sam gave Juan Vargas a quick push. He turned and grabbed Sergio Gomez. The door to the front room was opening. Sam half-lifted Gomez. He almost pitched him through the window.

"Don't shoot him!" McCallum was shouting. "Take him alive."

Light was streaming in from the front room. Footsteps hammered toward the window. Sam Bolivar had no chance to escape. "Ty-chee," he shouted. "Get them away!"

As he said that he whirled to face the men who were charging forward. There were three of them and they were almost on top of him. A clubbed gun smashed viciously at his head. Sam jerked out of the way. His fist swung up under the man's jaw. He half turned. He drove two hard blows at a second man, rocking the fellow backwards.

McCallum, back in the doorway to the front room, was still screaming at the men to take him alive. A rock-hard fist caught Sam squarely in the face. Another seemed to rip off his ear, driving him sideways, away from the window. Men were now shooting through the window but those outside should have had time enough to get away. Sam lowered his head and bulled forward, swinging with both fists. Hands caught his arms and held them down. A smashing blow ripped against the side of his head. It was followed by another. The light in the room faded. Another blow pitched him forward into a deep dark pit which had no conscious end.

SAM BOLIVAR became gradually aware of the murmuring sound of voices, and then that he was cold, and then of the hammering pain in his head. The beating he had taken had re-opened his scalp wound but he didn't know that.

"Throw another bucket of water on him," said Grover McCallum. "Wake him up."

The water splashed across Sam's face and chest. It brought a gasp from his throat. He opened his eyes. At first he could not focus them, but after a moment he made out the thin, tight-skinned face of Grover McCallum who was standing over him. He shifted his body and realized suddenly that he was lying in a pool of water on the hard floor in the front room of the Alcalde's home in Rio Verde. He remembered, then what had happened, and he wondered if Ty-chee, Juan, Sergio and the little girl had escaped. He sat up, closing his eyes against a momentary dizziness.

"Well, there he is," said McCallum. "There's your ghost. Who's afraid of him now?"

There were close to a dozen men standing and sitting around his room. The lamps were still burning so it was not yet morning. Sam glanced from side to side. He saw and recognized Jake Orphan, Will Herndon, Mike Patch, Jim Craine, Russ Delaney. He knew a few of the others. Some were strangers to him, men he hadn't met. He had never known all who worked for McCallum.

"Where are they?" McCallum asked suddenly. "Where are my wife and daughter?"

Sam looked up at this man who was so determined to make himself master of the Clackamas basin. There were haggard lines in McCallum's face. His eyes were red-rimmed, glassy. His lips formed a tight thin gash across his face.

"Answer me, damn you!" McCallum roared. "Where are they?"

He stepped suddenly forward. His boot lashed out and caught Sam Bolivar in the

stomach, driving the wind from him. Pain ran through Sam's body. A hoarse gasp tore from his throat.

"Where are they?" McCallum screamed again. "What have you done with them?"

Again that boot lashed out at Sam. The kick was higher this time. It was aimed at his head. It seemed to scrape off the entire side of his face. The dark shadows from which Sam had just escaped crowded in again. Sam had rolled to his side. He lay there fighting those shadows back.

"You'll never learn anything if you kick him to death," said Jake Orphan. "Give him a chance to talk."

McCallum twisted to face Jake Orphan. "When I want advice from you, I'll ask for it," he grated. "Shut up or get out of here."

Jake Orphan shrugged his shoulders. "I think we all ought to get out of here."

"Who are you afraid of?" McCallum asked crisply. "A handful of Mexicans? What could they do without Bolivar to lead them?"

"I still think we ought to get out," said Jake Orphan.

"Then get out. Any who are yellow can start to run now."

"Don't call me yellow!" Orphan snapped.

McCallum's hand moved toward his gun, then fell away, and Jake Orphan, who had stiffened, relaxed.

"That goes for any of you," said Grover McCallum, and his voice was grim. "Bolivar has had plenty of help. But Rio Verde was the only place he could get it. We are staying right here until we whip this thing. If you're too yellow to stick, you're free to ride."

No one in the room turned toward the door. The men here scowled back at McCallum.

"Get on with it," one of them growled. "None of us are running."

Sam Bolivar was sitting up again. He realized, vaguely, just what he faced. He knew there was no escape from it. McCallum was standing over him again. His lips were slightly parted. His eyes had narrowed. His breath was coming fast.

"Tell me, Bolivar," he shouted. "Tell me where they are!"

"Where is my father?" Sam's voice was unrecognizable. "Where are my brothers?"

McCallum's boot lifted straight toward his face. Sam rolled away. But he couldn't roll away from the next kick or the one which followed. He tried to cover his head but his arms weren't thick enough.

CHAPTER FOUR

Encircled!

DAY was slow in coming. The chilly night wind died. A thin, pale light crept into the eastern sky and gradually brightened. It spread over the Clackamas basin, pushing its way insistently into the shadows. The sun came up and started its climb into the heavens.

Grover McCallum stood in the doorway of the Alcalde's home in Rio Verde. The lines in his face were deep and ugly. His eyes were bloodshot. He was tired. He was hoarse from shouting. For once in his life he didn't stand quite straight.

In the room behind him several of his men were dozing. Several more stared at his back with bland, expressionless eyes. In the middle room where the prisoners had been held, a few men slept.

Sam Bolivar lay on the soggy wet floor. He was conscious again but he hadn't opened his eyes, this time, since regaining consciousness. He hadn't moved. This night, Sam knew, was one he would never forget, yet one he would never be able to remember distinctly. His impressions of it would always be blurred. How many times McCallum had stood over him, shouting at him, kicking at him, he didn't know. How much water had been thrown on him to bring him back from the peaceful darkness which still hovered so close, he would never

be able to guess. It probably made little difference. Death couldn't be far away.

From the doorway, McCallum stared out into the square made by this house, the cantina, the store and the church. It was deserted excepting for the horses belonging to his men. Up and down the street and between the buildings he could see maybe a dozen houses. There was no sign of activity near any of them. Rio Verde was still a deserted village.

McCallum wiped his hand over his face. It was a gesture of the weariness he felt. He wondered, for a moment, how Sam Bolivar had escaped death on Lost Boy mesa. This, however, was no longer important. All that mattered now, was what had happened to Sarah and Dorothy. Bolivar had taken them. He could be sure of that. And they were alive. All he had to do now was force Bolivar to talk. Either that, or find the people who had fled from Rio Verde. They would have the answer.

McCallum's shoulders straightened. He started to turn back into the house, but stopped. A man had appeared far down the street. A Mexican. He was old, stooped. He wore no hat. His hair was white. McCallum's hand had closed on his gun but he didn't draw it. He watched the Mexican plodding forward.

"Orphan!" he called suddenly. "Delaney! Come here."

Orphan joined him in the doorway and a moment later Russ Delaney showed up. They peered down the street.

"Manuel Moncado," said Jake Orphan. "The Alcalde. Maybe they're back."

"Maybe who's back?" McCallum asked.

"The people who live here."

"If they are," McCallum growled, "they're being awfully quiet about it."

THE Alcalde came steadily forward, his feet kicking up puffs of dust from the street. He passed the church. He headed straight for his home. In front of the door, he stopped. He looked up at the three men standing there. He had broad, sloping shoulders, a brown and deeply wrinkled face. His eyes were a mild blue.

"Ask him where he's been," McCallum said to Jake Orphan. "Ask him what he's doing here, what he wants."

Jake Orphan spoke to the old man in his halting Spanish. The Alcalde answered, his voice low, quiet, but what he said had a startling effect on Jake Orphan, who stiffened, and reached for his gun and looked quickly up and down the street.

"Well, what is it? What is it?" McCallum asked impatiently.

"He says they're back," Orphan replied. "He says they're all around us. He says if we hand over Sam Bolivar we can leave. If we refuse we die."

"He says what!" McCallum roared.

The Alcalde was talking again. Jake Orphan was listening.

"Shoot him down," McCallum grated. "To hell with his threats."

"Wait," said Jake Orphan. "He's going to show us what he means."

The Alcalde turned. He lifted both arms above his head and as he did this, men stepped into sight from behind the church, the store, the cantina. They appeared near the other buildings, McCallum could see. How many there were McCallum couldn't guess. Twenty-thirty—maybe more. They held rifles or waved pistols in the air. The Alcalde waved his arms once more and the men stepped from sight as quickly as they had appeared, although now, here and there, McCallum could see rifle barrels pointed this way.

"It's no empty threat he's making, chief," said Jake Orphan. "They've got this place surrounded."

Grover McCallum moistened his lips. "Ask him about my wife and daughter."

Jake Orphan spoke to the Alcalde and was answered.

"He says," Orphan reported, "that you must talk to Sam Bolivar about the women."

McCallum drew his gun. "Ask him where the women are," he grated. "Tell him if he doesn't answer me, he dies."

Orphan spoke again to the Alcalde. He listened to what the Alcalde had to say. He looked at McCallum.

"I wouldn't shoot him now," he said bluntly. "We're covered by too many guns."

"What did he say?" McCallum demanded.

"He said he was an old man. He said he wasn't afraid to die."

"Tell him to come inside," McCallum ordered. "This is a bluff. They can't hold us here."

"They're all around us, chief."

"What if they are?"

"A Mexican bullet can kill you as dead as any other kind of a bullet."

"Bring him in. Between him and Sam Bolivar we'll get at the truth."

As he said this, McCallum turned back inside. He lifted a hand to his face. He was perspiring. In spite of what he had said he was beginning to feel the pressure of the odds against him.

AN HOUR had passed. None of McCallum's men were sleeping now. Some stood near the windows and the open door, watching for some sign of the men of Rio Verde. They saw nothing which moved, nothing which gave any indication that the men who had been seen, were still here. Even the rifles once pointed at this house had vanished.

In the front room, through Jake Orphan, McCallum drove question after question at the Alcalde. He got no answers which were satisfactory. The Alcalde sat in a chair near the table, his hands folded in his lap. He showed no fear, no impatience, no anger. He glanced now and then toward Sam Bolivar who was still lying on the earth floor.

"You will let us go, Señor Bolivar and I," he said over and over. "After that you may leave in safety."

Sam was no longer lying in the pool of water. He had moved nearer the side of the room. McCallum had not bothered him since the Alcalde had arrived.

McCallum's men had felt the growing tension of the past hour. They were nervous, edgy. They remembered that they hadn't wanted to stay here all night. They periodically cast scowling glances at McCallum.

Mike Patch stood near the front door. He had been sleeping when the Alcalde arrived. He had seen none of the men McCallum saw. He had seen no once since waking up.

"I'm leaving," he said abruptly. "I'm getting out of here."

The Alcalde spoke. Jake Orphan shrugged his shoulders.

"What did he say?" Mike Patch demanded.

"He said he wouldn't advise it," Orphan answered.

Mike Patch stared through the door once more.

"There's no one out there," he declared. "I'll prove it."

He lunged through the door. He ran toward the horses at the tie-rail by the side of the cantina. The men in the house watched breathlessly. Mike Patch reached the horses. He untied one of them. He swung into the saddle. There was a single rifle shot. A high, thin scream broke from his lips. His horse reared into the air. He pitched from the saddle and lay motionless in the street where he had fallen.

Sam didn't see this, but from the attitudes of the men in this room and from what they said he knew what had happened. He lay on his side, watching McCallum, watching these men, wondering what would happen next, and where and how the break would come. McCallum's men had no personal stakes in this struggle.

"They're still out there," said Jake Orphan grimly. "What are we going to do, chief?"

Grover McCallum pulled in a long, slow breath. He didn't want to have to answer that question. He stared at Sam Bolivar and then at the Alcalde. Each of them returned his look without flinching. McCallum wondered suddenly, desperately, if he could ever force either of them to talk.

"Tell the Alcalde he can go," he said to Jake Orphan. "Tell the Alcalde we will leave his village, but we will take Sam Bolivar with us. Tell him if he refuses this bargain, he dies."

Jake Orphan spoke to the Alcalde, listened to his answer and afterwards turned to face McCallum. "He says he will make only one bargain," Orphan reported. "If both he and Bolivar are allowed to leave this house, we may leave the village."

"No."

"That's it, chief."

McCallum reached for his gun but as he drew it Jake Orphan stepped between him and the old man. There was a stubborn, ugly look on Orphan's face.

"We want to get out of here whether you do or not," he said bluntly. "We might not make it if anything happened to the Alcalde."

McCallum's eyes had narrowed. His gun centered on Jake Orphan's chest. "Out of the way," he said grimly. "I'm running this show."

Jake Orphan had paled. He moistened his lips. He hesitated too long. In his last moment on earth he saw this, and clawed desperately for his gun but his hand didn't even reach it. McCallum fired. He thumbed back the hammer of his gun and fired again as Jake Orphan's body slumped toward the floor, and he turned then and raked his sharp glance over the other men in this room.

None were looking out of the window or the door. They were facing McCallum, their eyes hard, watchful, their bodies tense. Several guns were half lifted toward him. This was a defensive measure which Orphan hadn't had the chance to take. No one was yet stepping forward to take up Orphan's battle. That might or might not come later. Just now, the issues hung in a precarious balance.

McCallum's voice cracked at them like a whip.

"Who else wants to switch sides? Who else wants to die?"

No one made any answer. Russ Delaney moistened his lips. His gun was half drawn. Sweat streaked into Will Herndon's eyes. He tried to blink it away. Jim Craine very slowly raised his gun an inch or two.

SAM BOLIVAR, on the side of the room and behind McCallum, came slowly to his knees. His face was so badly battered he could hardly see. Every muscle in his body ached. He straightened. He stood up.

"We're not running from a bunch of Mexican farmers," McCallum said flatly. "No one dictates to me. No one."

Sam's body weaved from side to side. His legs were shaky. He took an uncertain step toward McCallum. He took another. McCallum's men saw him but not one of them gave a cry of warning. Perhaps they had had enough of McCallum's sharp temper, of his blind stubbornness.

A wave of dizziness swept over Sam Bolivar. He swayed forward, caught his balance, and for a moment stood behind McCallum, his hands lifted shoulder high.

"I'll show you a way out of here," McCallum promised. "I'll show you a way out, right over the Alcalde's body."

Sam took another step forward. McCallum turned, faced him, and the shock of seeing him standing there hit McCallum with all the force of a blow. He caught his breath. He rocked back on his heels. He remembered his gun, then, and he swung it toward Sam Bolivar just as Sam lunged straight for him.

One of Sam's arms smashed down on McCallum's gun wrist, turning the gun aside as it exploded. Sam's other fist caught McCallum squarely in the face. All the

weight of Sam's body was behind this blow. It drove McCallum off balance. It rocked him backwards. Sam was bulling forward. He gave McCallum no chance to get set. He threw another blow at the man's face and another. McCallum slipped in the mud on the floor where Sam had been lying. His feet went out from under him.

Sam Bolivar, still stumbling forward, fell across McCallum's body. McCallum twisted to one side and then to the other, trying to roll free. Sam's fingers clawed up his body toward his throat. They fastened there like claws. They dug into his skinny neck. A high, thin scream tore from McCallum's throat, then was choked off. His body thrashed from side to side but Sam Bolivar was heavy, too heavy to throw off. McCallum's hands scraped at the puffed and swollen face of this man on top of him but even this was no help.

Sam's fingers dug deeper, dug into the bones of McCallum's throat. Here was the man responsible for the murders on Lost Boy mesa. Here was the man who had broken the peace of this basin. Here was the man who would have driven the people of Rio Verde from their homes. He had never had consideration for others, even for those who worked for him. He was entitled to none for himself.

The straining of McCallum's body suddenly ended. His muscles grew still, then flabby, but Sam Bolivar's fingers did not relax their hold. Someone was touching him, shaking him. The voice of the Alcalde reached his ears. "Enough, Señor Sam," the old man was saying. "We will go, now."

Sam pulled his cramped hands away from McCallum's throat. He rolled over. He sat up. He stared at his curving fingers, wondering if he could ever straighten them again.

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"We will go now," the Alcalde was saying again.

Sam got to his feet. He stared at McCallum's men. Their guns covered him and the Alcalde. Will Herndon was shaking his head.

"You'll not go," he declared. "You'll not go until we get out of here. We'll trade you even—freedom for freedom, our lives for yours."

"If you leave here," said Sam slowly, "You'll ride out of the basin. Is that understood? You'll head straight out today."

Herndon nodded. "Straight out today."

Sam looked down into the mottled, purplish face of Grover McCallum, whose conquest of this basin had come to an abrupt end in death. These other men were guilty, too, but they had been only pawns in the game.

"Step to the door," he said to the Alcalde. "Tell your people to let these men go. Tell them there will be no more trouble in the Clackamas."

ROSITA had applied a salve to his face. This she topped with hot cloths and then with cold, alternating the process endlessly. Sam Bolivar's face felt completely cooked. He stared through one set of cloths at a grinning Ty-chee.

"I'm more of a red man now than you ever were," he muttered.

"In a week," said the Indian, "you will be riding again. Your face, however, will never look the same. Perhaps that is just as well."

"In a day I will be riding again," Sam declared.

"One of McCallum's men," Ty-chee reported, "wants to talk to you."

"They are supposed to have left the basin," Sam answered.

"This one," said Ty-chee, "met us outside after Juan Vargas, Sergio Gomez, and his daughter escaped from the Alcalde's. He saw you in the house but gave no alarm. He was not with the men in the fight on Lost Boy mesa."

"Cam Willowby?"

"Yes."

"Bring him in," Sam ordered.

Rosita frowned. "Not now. You can talk to him later."

"I will talk to him now," Sam growled. "You are not ordering me around yet."

Rosita lifted the cold cloths from Sam's face. She replaced them grimly with hot cloths. Sam howled.

"You may talk with Señor Willowby," said Rosita firmly, "in half an hour. Not sooner."

"Bring him in," Sam said to Ty-chee.

Ty-chee was still grinning. "Do not make me a party to your quarrel. It will take half an hour to bring him here. You both win."

* * *

Cam Willowby stood in front of Sam Bolivar without flinching. A scowl hardened his face. "I'm asking you for nothing

(Please continue on page 66)

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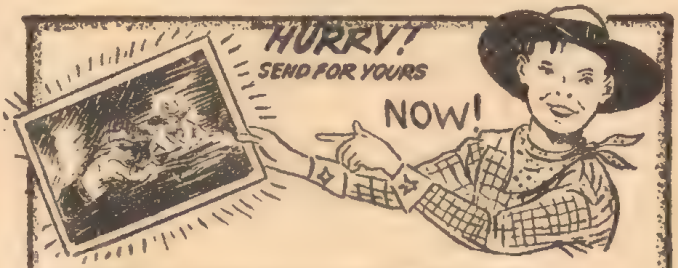

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Nipo screamed and waved the letter. . . .

HOMECOMING

This I knew in that strange homecoming: One of my father's people had killed my young wife, and he must pay for it according to my own bitter code.

By Marvin De Vries

CHAPTER ONE

Bushwhack Welcome

BECAUSE of horse raids and massacres by the Kiowas, and the theft of age-old rights by the Texans, there has always been great bitterness and hatred between the Kiowa Tribe and the Tejanos living across the Red River. I do not know whose fault it is, but I do know that when

we crossed the river from The Nations into Texas, my son and I, we were taking our lives in our hands.

This river had become a deadline between the two places, and no Indians were allowed to cross it. They were shot on sight, at least so I was told, and I was becoming more and more convinced that I would be mistaken for one, surely from a distance, and, perhaps, even at close range.

My hair was black, my skin Indian-brown, and, if anyone looked close, scars were visible on my breasts from the thongs I had put through them to test myself when I was a boy. I supposed everybody knew about this severe Kiowa custom, and that it made me a marked man. Besides, I rode like an Indian, and felt and acted like one. A man does not shed all these things by crossing a river. His nature becomes a part of his looks, so I was very worried about our safety.

I could talk a little English, a mixture of Spanish-English-Kiowa, most of which I had picked up from Texas drovers who used to pass through The Nations. At such times as we felt strong enough, we haggled with them for wohaw, the lawful tribute we claimed for allowing them passage through our country, and I had learned what I knew from them. I hoarded the words they spoke and tried to learn their meanings, so at last it came quite easy, but I felt that now I was likely to get shot from a distance before I got a chance to use any of my hard-won learning and say who we were.

Mr. Noble, the agent, who paid annuities and issued ration beef, had given me a letter to show to strangers who tried to stop us, explaining who we were and what we were trying to do, but I began to doubt that anyone would come close enough to read it before using their guns. I finally put this letter in my son's keeping.

He took after his mother and looked more like an Indian than I did, but, still, he was only three years old, and it seemed to me no one would shoot him, at least not as quickly as they might me. I told him to take good care of the letter, and if anything happened to me he was to show it to the first man he met, and, because of his age, he would probably be helped on his way.

The weather was hot and dry, and the smell of my tired horse put a choke in my throat. My legs had worked up a salty lather along its ribs; the sun dried it to crust, and desperate flies swarmed around it.

My son's horse was a smaller, gentler animal. It had less weight to carry and looked fresher, but my son was tired out. No matter how small the horse might be, the boy still had to keep his legs spread wide apart to straddle the animal, and he must have felt by now that he was getting split in two. In keeping with his bringing-up, he didn't complain, but I could see he was all through with this trip and wanted to turn around and go back home.

So I told him again why we had come.

"When I was your age, Nipo, I was stolen from my home in Texas by Ota Kte, the old chief who has the white buffalo robe. Now, he has told Mr. Noble who I am, and we are going back to live with my people, in a big house with glass windows and wooden floors. My mother will hold you in her arms and sing you to sleep like your own mother used to do before she went to the sand hills. She will do this because you are my son, and she will think she is doing it to me, at least that is what I think is in the heads of all these grandmothers. It will make your heart glad again."

Of course, I was guessing at what my mother would do, but I was quite sure I was right. A boy, even an Indian or one with mixed blood, is still a boy, and quickly touches the heart of anyone. I gave him a drink of water and a piece of jerky to chew on, and we rode on.

According to my best reckoning, we were passing through country called the Tallow Cache Hills. As I had done ever since we crossed the river, I kept a sharp lookout

in all directions, but a man can't look through a tree and know what is on the other side. This difficulty got us into trouble.

We reached the crest of a hill and started down the other side when two mounted men came out of the jackpine and blocked our way. I could tell it wasn't happenstance. It was a set ambush, and I never saw them until it was too late. They both carried rifles.

One man aimed his weapon at Nipo, as if he were a deadly enemy, the other man covered me. They looked mean and hostile, although I think now they meant at first only to tease us. I raised my hand to show we were peaceable.

"We are friends," I told them. "We have a letter from Mr. Noble."

My command of English was small, and I won't try to repeat exactly what I said. I am writing this in retrospect, and all I will try to do is to give the meaning of what I said in the English I know now. I told Nipo to show them the letter, and he got it out and held it toward them, but neither of them would take hold of it.

They dismounted and took a careful walk around us, inspecting us from head to foot. They winked at each other, and then one of them poked Nipo with the tip of his rifle barrel, and Nipo almost went overboard.

I was watching that when the other one grabbed my near leg and pried it forward and threw me off my horse. It made me fighting mad, but I couldn't save myself, and I landed with a hard thud on the far side of the animal.

MR. NOBLE had advised me against carrying a weapon of any kind, thinking we would be safer unarmed, but I had my skinning knife and tried to use it at this time. I got it in my hand and made a leap, but before I could get close enough the other man fired a shot that nipped my leggins and brought me to a scared stop. Then the man who had tipped me off my horse came at me again, swinging his rifle, and I thought he was going to club me to death with it.

Nipo screamed and waved the letter, and this time the man nearest him took hold of it and told them other one to wait. He read the letter through, then handed it to the other man and told him to read it.

They were very interested in what it said, and moved off out of hearing to talk about it. I thought of trying to escape, but I knew it wouldn't be done with our tired horses.

They finally came to an agreement of some kind, and one of them found a piece of pencil in his pocket and started to write on the clean side of the paper, using the other's back for a smooth surface. When he was finished, they read what he had written, then handed it to me and told me to ride on.

"We're keeping the kid," the dark-haired one said, pointing a thumb at Nipo. "You follow the directions I wrote out on that paper, and you'll get him back. Otherwise, you won't. Now go on!"

At this point, a third man arrived. He startled the other two more than he did me. At first, I thought he must be one of them, but apparently that wasn't so, although they seemed to know each other, and he looked enough like one of them to be a brother.

His voice was rough and threatening, and he called the one who looked like him by name. They seemed to realize he was a dangerous man, and when he told them to leave they did so without an argument. After they were gone, he turned to me and asked if my name was Scrib Masse.

It wasn't a name I had often answered to. Wovoka was my Kiowa name, but I recognized the sound of the new one, and said it was mine. I couldn't tell whether this information pleased him or not, but he spoke a few words in Kiowa, welcoming us to Texas, but his indifferent manner made it hard to say whether he meant it or not.

Nipo was shaking with fright, and I took

him down and held him a while, but it didn't help any. He didn't seem to realize that this man had helped us. I told him he was our friend, but he shook his head and twisted and squirmed and let out a screech when I took him too close. He almost shamed me with this behaviour, and I told him so, but of course I realized he was too tired to be brave.

The stranger's name was Mitch Hagen. He was foreman on my father's Circle M ranch and had come to meet us. "Your father isn't home right now, but as soon as we got word you were coming your mother sent me up to meet you. Sorry I'm a little late."

These again were friendly words, but there was no sound of friendship in them. They came from his head, not his heart, and he didn't even seem to care whether I heard them or not. He was older than I was, as I saw it, and the way he sent those other two men away, without giving much time or thought to it, impressed me.

"I think you came just in time," I told him. "I am sure they meant to kill me."

"Might be so," he agreed, as if it wouldn't have been any great misfortune. However, I can't say he showed us any animosity. It seemed more as if he had more important matters on his mind that took him far away. "No one said anything about this boy," he went on. "Who is he?"

"He is my son," I explained. "His name is Nipo."

This was enough for a while. Then he asked, "Where's his mother?"

"She's dead," I said. The sudden sorrow that always came like a gust of wind when I spoke those words blocked my voice. "She took her life with her own hands."

"I see." He didn't show any natural sympathy or surprise. I could have said something about the weather, and his answer would have been about the same.

Perhaps he is so used to violence such things don't touch him, I thought. He looked like a violent man, a man with thunder in his heart. Abruptly, he said, "Your boy's afraid of me."

I didn't try to deny it. He could see much too clearly for anything like that. "He connects you with them," I said. "I did, too, at first. You look like one of them."

A mirthless laugh sounded in his throat. "Is that so?"

His words sounded so resentful, so outraged, I was sorry I had spoken. "He'll be friendly when he knows how things are," I said. I showed him Mr. Noble's letter, but he was more interested in what was written on the other side.

When he had finished reading, his mouth drew into tight bitter lines, but he had no comment to make.

"At first," I went on, "I didn't think they meant us any real harm, but after they read Mr. Noble's letter, saying who we were and where we were going, they changed their mind and wrote out those directions. They intended to keep Nipo!"

Hagen nodded, and explained the note to me. They were going to hold Nipo for ransom. They wanted ten thousand dollars from my father. The money was to be brought to this same place within a week, and when that was done Nipo would be returned. Otherwise, he would be killed.

When he had finished explaining this to me, he said, "Let's go," and led the way down the hill. Our tired horses had trouble following him.

WE REACHED my father's house the next day at early dark. They had been watching for us and were in the yard to greet us when we arrived. I was a little frightened, because I knew nothing about my parents. I had no memory of them at all, and they most likely would have an image of me in their hearts that was sure to be different than I was.

I think the first sights of me stunned my mother, me with my odd clothes and strange ways, but then she burst into tears and

took me in her arms. My father was still away, she said. I had a brother by the name of Jack, who was somewhat younger than I.

My mother patted my shoulder and kissed my cheek, and I felt her sorrow and her joy and tried to seem a little boy long lost without her.

No one seemed to notice Nipo, and he stayed on his horse until I lifted him down. "This is my son," I said, and I must have sounded proud, because that is how I feel about him. "My son, Nipo."

Jack's head whipped my way as if I had it on a rope, and another stunned look came to my mother's eyes, stunned and dismayed, if I was any judge. But she finally brought a smile to her lips and said. "He looks like a tired little boy."

That was all that was said, but I sensed some kind of objection to him, and spoke up to say he wouldn't be any bother to anyone. "His mother brought him up to mind."

"Of course," she said with sudden overflowing kindness, and took us into the house.

The meal was ready, and we sat down at the table, Nipo beside me in a special high chair made for children. They hurriedly found it in a storeroom somewhere and dusted it off and put him into it. My mother said it was one I had used. "Don't you remember?"

"Perhaps, a little," I said—for her sake.

A girl with very blonde hair and quiet ways brought in the food. At first, I thought she must be my sister, although I could hardly imagine anyone with such light-colored hair being blood kin, but my mother explained she was a bound girl, and I thought it meant something like a slave such as the Cherokees used to keep before they came to The Nations. I thought she was very pretty, and especially kind to Nipo. They called her Lennie.

My mother was worried because my father hadn't returned as soon as he was expected. The drought had forced him to sell some cattle to a rancher who lived far to the east and had water to spare. He had told her he was to be paid in cash, and she was worried for fear someone would try to rob him.

"Nobody knows he's got it," Jack told her. "He won't go along waving it to everybody he meets."

"There are men who make it their business to know such things," she insisted. "If he isn't home by tomorrow noon, I'm going to send Mitch after him."

"He won't like it," Jack stated.

They mentioned the sum of ten thousand dollars, the same sum the two outlaws who had stopped me intended to demand as ransom for Nipo. I didn't connect what had happened to me with what they were talking about, but I did notice that the sum was the same.

After the meal, my mother spoke to Jack privately about something that made him raise a fuss, but she insisted, and, a little later, he asked me if I wouldn't like to go outside and wash up. "Take the boy, too," he said. "I'll show you where."

The girl, Lennie, gave me some soft soap in a dish, and a smile to go with it. She carried Nipo from the dining room to the kitchen and put him down beside me. "Such a nice little boy," she said, and patted his head, a soft laugh bubbling up out of her as if the sight of him brought her joy. Jack lit a lantern and took us to the watertank under the windmill.

I smiled a little in the dark, telling myself this was one of the things a man had to bear from a woman. My wife was the same, pushing Nipo and me into things like this even if we didn't want to. She herself bathed every day, and put a scent of steeped pine needles on her body in order to smell fresh and clean. But I couldn't persuade myself that this was nothing more. My son was very dark, and I was sure my mother hoped I could wash off a little of the color.

I could forgive her, because I knew the color wouldn't matter at all in a few days.

A boy is a boy anywhere, any time, and before many days passed, he would catch hold of her heart and win her love. It was true a long time ago, when the Kiowas carried me off instead of killing me, and it was true now. Such things don't change, and no one can fight against them.

I covered Nipo from head to foot with the soft soap and threw water over him, and then went after myself. Jack held the lantern.

He noticed the scars on my chest and asked if I had got them in a fight. I shook my head, and told him about the custom we had of punching holes through the skin of our breasts and running strips of rawhide through the holes so we could tie ourselves to a post and pull ourselves free without touching the thongs with our hands. It is a hard thing to do.

"Sometimes, it takes several days," I told him. "It is a kind of a test a boy must go through to prove his courage."

CHAPTER TWO

Marked for Vengeance

MITCH HAGAN, the ranch foreman, came our way, and listened to some of this talk, but he said nothing, and no one spoke to him. He looked very lonely, but he looked, too, as if he held himself away from others.

"That's how he is," Jack told me when he went away. "He cat-foots around here so you never know where he's going to show up. But he's a good foreman. Pop swears by him."

"He seems like a troubled man," I said, "troubled and lonely. Does he have any kin?"

Jack nodded. "Yes, I think he's got a brother, but I never saw him."

Nipo was shaking and shivering, I noticed, so I wrapped him up in the towel, and put on my clothes, the clean shirt and trousers my mother had sent along, and hurried him into the house. I put him straight to bed. Lennie, the bound girl, showed me where, carrying a lamp ahead of me.

I pulled a blanket over Nipo and told him if he wet during the night I would singe his hide in the morning. This was Kiowa talk, and, of course, the girl didn't understand it.

Nipo promised he wouldn't, his black eyes boring up at me. He looked as if he wanted to say more, but I didn't wait to hear. "Go to sleep, boy," I told him, and walked out.

The girl cleared away the dishes, and the rest of us went into another room and sat in chairs facing a fireplace made of big stones. My mother wanted to know all about me from the time I was carried away until at last they found me back.

I told them it was Ota Kte and his band who had carried me off, and it was he, old and spent now, who had told Mr. Noble, the agent, who I was.

"Some ration beef came up there from this ranch, and Ota Kte remembered the brand. In fact, he had stolen the branding iron during the raid. He still had it, and showed it to the agent. It was a circle with an M inside of it. Mr. Noble did the rest. At first, I didn't think I could come, because of my family, except perhaps for a visit, but we had some serious trouble at that time, and after it was over, I thought it would be a good thing for Nipo to come."

Jack didn't enjoy this talk. He wanted to hear tales of raids and massacres, as if, each day, we tried to find some poor wanderer to kill, while, actually, we were obliged to hunt most of the time in order to keep our families in meat and clothing. He asked me what this serious trouble was, so I told them about that, too.

"My wife's name was Star. One day, she and Nipo went to the agency for some annuity salt. It was a full day's trip. On the way home, they were stopped by a white man, who could understand and talk our

tongue. Nipo says this man asked some questions, and my wife answered them as best she could. Nipo says she didn't seem afraid. After he had asked his questions, the man started away, but, all at once he changed his mind and came back and pulled her off her horse. Nipo says they 'had a fight', which is as much as he understands about it, and that she called out to Nipo to run away, which he did. They got home later than usual. It was almost dark. She told me what had happened, and reproached herself for allowing this man to come near her. She was stricken with shame.

"I was very angry and tried to find out from her what this man looked like, but she couldn't tell me enough to put an image in my mind, and Nipo could do no better. I took my horse and rode toward the agency, thinking I might find his campfire, or something that would put me on his trail, but I found nothing. Even by daylight, I could find no sign to follow, and I returned to our little village on Round Moon Fork.

"Nipo met me outside. He said she was sleeping now, but when I went in, I could see that wasn't it. She had stabbed herself through the heart, and she was gone."

It had taken a long time to tell, because I had trouble finding the right words, and even when I did, it didn't come easy. When I had finished, I sat a while thinking about it. Then I smiled at my mother to let her know that much of the sting had gone out of it, although there had been a long time when I could hardly restrain myself from doing just what Star had done.

"Well, it's all over now, Scrib," my mother finally said, with earnest sympathy. "You mustn't think about it any more. We'll help you forget, and in a little while it will all be gone. Now we better go to bed."

She gave me a lamp, telling me how to put out the flame when I was through with it, and I went to my room. Nipo was still awake. His eyes followed me around as I took off my clothes, and I think he heard most of what I had said in the other room.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked him. "Why don't you go to sleep?"

He said he was afraid to be alone. "I'm afraid that man will come and fight with me."

He had said things like that before, and I knew what man he meant. "We will never see that man again, Nipo," I told him. "Go to sleep."

"But he is here. He is the one who brought us here, the one who came to watch us wash ourselves."

I stopped in my tracks, and felt a shiver run down my back. "Don't lie, Nipo," I told him. No one knows what goes on in the head of a small boy.

"I'm not," he said.

"Do you mean to tell me that the man who brought us here is the one who pulled your mother off the horse?"

He nodded solemnly, and I stood there naked trying to think if it could be true. I recalled that he had spoken a few words of Kiowa when we first saw him. I remembered that ration beef from this place had come to the agency at that time. I remembered Nipo's odd shivering and shaking every time this man came near us. I knew he had been frightened ever since we left the Tallow Cache Hills, and I knew he was right.

Hagen was the man I had looked for so long. Now I could take my revenge. But I had waited a long time, and I could wait another night.

I blew out the flame inside the chimney and got into bed beside Nipo.

MY FATHER came home sometime during the night. I should have closed the door to our room, I suppose, but I hadn't done so, and when I woke up in the morning, I could hear my father and mother arguing about Nipo.

"I'm not going to have that boy in this house," my father stated with stubborn anger in his voice. "You know how I feel

about them breeds. I won't have him around, that's all."

I couldn't understand all her answers, but she was trying to keep him a little quiet, probably worrying that I would overhear. Once, she said very positively, "I don't want you to do anything that will turn Scrib against us, Sam. Scrib's fond of the boy, and we've got to make the best of it until we find some way to handle it."

"What does this little Kiowa brat look like, an Injun?"

"Of course he does. Why wouldn't he?"

"He could look like Scrib, couldn't he?"

"Scrib looks like an Indian, too. It shocked me."

"*Agh!* For heaven's sake! Why didn't somebody say something about all this? What's the matter with Noble up there? He didn't even tell us Scrib was married. Or isn't he?"

"Of course he is."

"Well, where's his wife, or squaw, or whatever they call 'em?"

My mother talked a long time, telling him what I had told her and Jack the previous night. "I don't want you to fly off the handle, Sam," she said, finally. "I s'pose we've got to do something, but we've got to be careful."

"I never saw the beat. I'll go see if they're up. Help me with this shirt. Ouch! My arm."

He complained some more about his arm while she was helping him. From the talk, I was led to believe he had been shot fighting off a pair of outlaws who had tried to rob him. I heard more about it at the table later.

In spite of my curiosity to see what he was like, I pretended to be asleep when he looked in, and he went away. Nipo was still dead asleep. He had his back turned to me, and I saw how brown it was. I put my hand on it, and it had the soft feel of a young animal, the same soft feel as his mother when she was warm beside me.

I got up and put on the clean cotton clothes. There were no boots, so I put on the old moccasins with the rawhide soles Star had made. The bound girl came to the door and said it was time to eat.

Nipo came awake and stood up in the bed. I could see his nakedness shamed the girl a little because I was there, so I picked him up and held him to me. He whispered in my ear, and I hurried him outside. When we came back, he wanted the girl to help him with a stocking, something that was a total puzzle to him. He held it up to her to show he wanted to be friendly, and he felt of her face while she was pulling it on.

She laughed, and said again, "Such a nice little boy."

My father came in again to welcome me home. He was big and heavyset and wore a beard. His left arm was bandaged and hung in a sling. He looked uncomfortable, and an uneasy smile showed on his face.

"Scrib, boy," he said, with a quiver in his voice. "This is a day I almost gave up hope of ever seeing."

"I'm glad you're pleased," I answered, "and we will try not to be any trouble."

"Agh! Who said anything about trouble? Say, you talk English right enough."

"I learned a little from the Texas drovers that used to come through The Nations," I told him. "We claimed toll from them, and I often had to do the arguing, so I learned some that way."

He laughed and gave me a knowing look. "I know about that toll. I got it in the neck myself more'n once."

"I started a herd of my own up there on what we collected," I said. "Those and bunch-quitters and young ones."

"You did?" He looked pleased. "Regular chip off the old block, eh? How many you got?"

"Over three thousand head."

His eyes bulged, then settled down again. He must have thought my statement was an Indian exaggeration. I could see he didn't believe it, but I knew what I was talking about. I had made a count and had had

Mr. Noble total it up. My father said that was quite a few, and I said I thought so, too.

Lennie, the bound girl, picked Nipo up and started to carry him out, but my father stopped her and took hold of my son's arm and poked him in the chest with his thumb. "Well, well, well, so this is the boy ma's been telling me about," he said in a hearty voice. "How you like it here, boy?"

I wished Nipo had sense enough to smile at my father, but he didn't. He started back without blinking an eye, a kind of leave-me-alone-and-mind-your-own-business look.

"He doesn't understand English," I said.

"Well, well, well," my father repeated, booming it so loud it sounded as if he were really pleased.

I began to feel better. *Even a sober boy like that,* I thought, *has a way with him. Everything will turn out the way we all wish. If only it wasn't true what Nipo told me last night about the foreman!*

DURING the meal, my father told us what had happened to him. Soon after he had been paid off for his cattle, two outlaws had tried to ambush and rob him. It was his opinion that they had followed him all the way to the ranch where he had sold his cattle, because they knew exactly how much cash he carried, a thing they could have learned only from local sources.

"Somebody around here must've talked about it. That's the reason they followed me. Jack, did you talk about it?"

Jack said he hadn't.

"Anyway, you should've kept the crew with you," my mother stated.

"I know it, but there was some delay, and I sent 'em home."

I don't recall all the details, because my thoughts wandered, but there had been a short gunfight, and he had driven them off. The ten thousand dollars was now safe in the big iron box in his office. I think he was very pleased with the whole thing and a little proud of his wound.

After the meal, my father and Jack and I went outside, and they showed me around. First we stopped at the office, a small room at the rear of the house which could be entered by means of an outside door. Here, I was told, my father spent most of his time. They showed me the iron safe in which the ten thousand dollars had been placed for safe-keeping.

All at once, Jack remembered about the scars on my chest, and I had to show them and repeated how they got there. We stopped at the bunkhouse and looked in, but there was no one there. I was introduced to the cook, who thumped around on a wooden leg.

When we reached the barn, Hagen, the foreman, stepped out, and my father told me to shake hands with him. "He's the man you got to get along with around here, Scrib," he stated with a half-sheepish grin.

"They know each other," Jack put in. "He went to meet Scrib."

"Oh, yeah, that's right," my father said. "Well, shake, anyway."

Hagen reached out his hand, but I didn't take it.

"Go ahead, Scrib," my father urged. "He won't bite." He laughed, and Jack laughed with him, as if they weren't at all sure he wouldn't bite.

I stepped back and put my hands behind me. This wasn't the time and place I would have chosen to make my accusations. I tried to hold back, but fury engulfed me, and I lost control of myself. I grabbed my knife and leaped straight at him.

It was nothing to me that he wasn't armed. No one waits for a mad dog to sharpen its teeth.

I struck out with my knife intending to kill him with one blow, but I only scratched his skin, a long cut from chest to knee. He was too quick, or my manner had warned him. He jumped back and got away from the worst of it, but in all his hurry he tripped and went down on his back.

I tried again, circling around trying to get

at him, but he moved with me, one leg stuck out straight, the other crooked up ready to kick if I got too close. My father called my name and grabbed my shoulder, but I twisted away and told him to stand back.

A burst of accusations poured off my lips, all in Kiowa, although I didn't recollect until later that Hagen understood the tongue. I spoke out with the words that came to my lips first. Jack was frozen in his tracks, motionless as a post. I made another stab, and slashed Hagen's leg, but that was all. My father found a piece of wood on the ground and struck me down, knocking me senseless.

CHAPTER THREE

Kiowa Kill

THE rest of that day was a blank to me. The day following was Saturday, and I spent it in bed. If I sat up, I got dizzy and fell down. If I made a quick move of any kind, the room started to spin around me.

My father told me he was sorry he hit me so hard. "But I had to do something in a hurry," he said. "What on earth possessed you, Scrib?"

"*He* knows."

"He doesn't know anything of the kind."

"I told him. You know what happened to my wife. Well, he did it."

"Oh no, Scrib, that isn't true!"

"It is true. Nipo told me. He recognized him when he met us in the Tallow Cache Hills. I don't know why he didn't tell me then, but perhaps he was too frightened. I tried to kill him, and I'll try it again."

My father got up and walked to the window. He looked outside a while, then came back to the bed and said earnestly, "There isn't a word of truth in what your boy told you, Scrib. He's made a mistake. Mitch hasn't been up into The Nations since he started working for me. That's five years ago, long before your boy was even born."

I didn't have an answer, but I shook my head. I couldn't believe it.

"Men look alike, you know. You shouldn't put so much stock in a boy's say-so. My God, you might've killed him!"

"I surely tried," I said. I stared up at the ceiling, trying to think it through. I recalled my own doubts when Nipo first told me, and my first feeling that Hagen was a man of great quality.

Surely, my father's words must be true. Kinship made them so. He couldn't betray me in such an important thing.

All at once, bitter disgust swept over me. I put my hand over my face in shame. "I have made a terrible mistake," I said in a choked voice.

My father looked relieved and let a long breath go. "Well, it's over," he said at last, "and I'm sure Mitch won't hold it against you. I'll explain it to him, but I do think you ought to apologize."

"I'll do that," I said. "You send him in sometime."

My mother came in later to say she was having a caller that afternoon, who was coming especially to see me, and she wondered if I minded if she brought her friend in to see me. I said I would rather be excused if she could manage it without hurting anyone's feeling, because my head hurt and I don't know what explanations to make.

"Show Nipo to her," I said. "You can talk about him."

She looked distressed a moment, and then she said she had promised to let Nipo go out riding in the buckboard with Lennie for the afternoon. "I'll tell her she can see you next time."

"That would be best," I agreed.

"Tomorrow," she went on, "we are invited to some other friends for dinner, Scrib. Do you think you can manage that, or shall I send word we can't come?"

"No," I said, "that will be all right. I'll be better by then."

At noon, Lennie came in with my dinner. She had to feed me because I couldn't sit up without getting dizzy. I think we both enjoyed it. My fight with Hagen wasn't mentioned.

"It looks like you are Nipo's best friend," I told her.

"He's such a nice boy," she said. "We are going riding this afternoon."

"That's what my mother said. I wish I could go along. Or do I scare you?"

She made a scornful gesture, as if I couldn't possibly do such a thing. I spouted some Kiowa, but that didn't do it either, and we both laughed. "I wish you could go along, too," she said. "I honestly do."

"I will sometime," I told her. She was so fair, I wanted to touch her. I suppose Nipo had the same notion when he put his hand to her face, as he did so often. That was what I wanted to do, but I didn't have his courage.

"Are you taking Nipo out riding because my mother doesn't want him here when her friend comes?" I asked her.

Her answer to that was earnest when it came, but it took her time to gather it together. "You mustn't ever think such a thing," she told me. "They are good people. They will hold back as long as they can, and then they will come to him on their knees."

Mitch Hagen came in toward evening, and I made my apology. He said he didn't blame me for what I had done, and he was a little gentler in speech and manner than usual. "I understood some of your talk out there at the barn," he said, "and I realized right along that your boy was frightened of me ever since we met in the Tallow Cache Hills."

"I can't understand it!" I said. "He's young, but he usually knows what he's talking about."

"There is an explanation," he told me, drawing away again into that cold, fault-finding place he saved for himself, "and I feel obliged to tell you what it is. Do you remember you said I looked like one of those two men who were bothering you up there in the jackpine?"

I nodded, and could almost guess what was coming.

"He is my brother," he told me, and the words brought a flush to his face. "I know we look alike, and I think your boy got us confused. What my brother did is nothing new for him. He did it before, and he'll do it again. There are other things, too. Two years ago, he killed one of our neighbors for pocket money. I think he is the man who tried to rob your father the other day. It went wrong, and he was heading for Indian Territory when you met him. He knew your father had ten thousand dollars cash. That was why he named that sum for ransom."

I felt very sorry for the man who was telling me this, and I told him so, but he wouldn't allow anything like that to pass between us.

"This is his country," he went on. "You may run into him again. If you do, shoot him on sight." He got up and walked to the door. His voice dropped to a thin self-accusing whisper. "That is what I would do —if I had the heart."

ON SUNDAY morning, I felt much better, and got dressed to go visiting. Jack gave me a suit to wear. I could get into it, but it was too tight and gave me an odd look that made us all laugh. "What's Nipo going to wear?" I asked.

My mother said he wasn't going along. "He wants to stay with Lennie," she said. "They've become such friends."

"I thought she was going, too," I said a little unhappily.

"Oh, no." She sounded surprised that such a thing would occur to me.

At the last moment, I decided I couldn't go either. "I might get another dizzy spell," I told them. "It's better that I stay home."

They were disappointed, but the three of them, my mother, and father, and Jack,

went without me. The men in the bunkhouse had been on a Saturday-night spree in town, and I think they slept all morning. I didn't see any of them around.

Lennie got dinner for the three of us, and we sat down together to eat it. Nipo made me laugh. He was happy again. Through me, he asked Lennie questions about things around us, and he wouldn't let me give the answers. He wanted me to interpret, and he told me boldly I didn't know anything about them, anyway.

So I asked her the questions, and when he finally gave me a little rest, I asked her one of my own. I asked her if she would marry me.

It stunned her into silence, but I could see it didn't offend her. She finally said I didn't know what I was saying. "I'm a bound girl," she told me. "I couldn't do anything like that if I wanted to. Your folks have bought my services, and I must work them out."

"Then I'll buy you. That's what we do, anyway. I paid ten horses for—for—" I stopped suddenly, and my head went down. I began to understand that this was very unseemly talk.

"But you brought no horses," she went on.

I glanced up and saw the kind mischief in her eyes. "Maybe he would take cows instead," I said, smiling back.

"How many cows?" She laughed outright now. "I see no cows either. I think it would take more cows than horses."

"I can pay him anything up to three thousand head," I said. "That's all I have."

"If you have that many, you are rich," she said, gravely. "Richer than your father."

I could see she didn't believe me, either. "No man is rich unless he has horses," I told her. "But I am in earnest. I have had terrible trouble. Perhaps you know."

She nodded, and I went on: "Nipo needs a mother, I need a wife, and you have taken a place in both our hearts."

All at once, she started to cry. I don't know what caused it, but Nipo blamed me and hit me with his hand. Lennie got up and went to the kitchen. I had to help Nipo out of his high chair, so he could follow her and try to console her. In Kiowa, if you please!

I went into the living room, wondering what I had done wrong to put her into tears. Perhaps the buying and selling talk did it. Perhaps, I dared to think, she likes what I said, but thinks it isn't possible.

I stared out the window at the thick greenery behind the barn, shiveling now in the drought, but it reminded me of my place on Round Moon Fork, and I wondered whether Nipo and I ought not to go back. I had all those cows in the care of my friends, but it wasn't their nature to mind them, and I couldn't rely on it too long. My folks resented Nipo, and I wondered if it was true, as Lennie claimed, and as I tried to believe, that time would bring them to him.

I did know that if I went away I would leave sorrow behind, more than I had come to, because there would be a new wound to heal on account of my going.

I saw Mitch Hagen came out of the quarters he occupied by himself near the barn, and thought of asking his advice, but I decided not to trouble him with it. My eyes followed him across the yard until I lost sight of him around the corner of the house. I heard the door to my father's office open, and close again behind him.

I don't know how long he was there. I didn't keep track of the time. Two punchers came outside and sat in the sun awhile, then went back into the bunkhouse. The cook with the wooden leg hung some towels in the sun to dry.

Hagen finally came out of the office again and started across the yard back to his quarters. This time, the minute I set eyes on him, I knew there was something wrong. I didn't know just what. He had the same busy walk. He was dressed as usual.

But it wasn't Hagen. It was someone else. I'll never know why I knew it, but I did.

My father's gun hung on a peg in the kitchen. I took it out of the holster and stepped outside. The man had gotten as far as the water-tank.

I called Hagen's name, and he stopped and asked irritably what I wanted. It wasn't Hagen's voice, but he tried to make it sound the same. I told him I wanted him to come to the porch.

He hesitated a moment, looked around in all directions, then turned and fired a shot at me. It hit an upright and threw splinters in my face.

NOW I knew who it was. Mitch Hagen's brother. I recalled his name. I had heard Mitch mention it up there in the Tallow Cache Hills.

His name was Mel, and it wasn't hard to guess what he had come for. This was his hard try for my father's cattle cash.

Another shot came my way and I fired back and went down the steps. He started to run. I fired again and knocked him down, and he took cover behind the water tank.

Cowpunchers streamed out of the bunkhouse, and I motioned them to Mitch's quarters. Before they got there, a man came out and fled toward the willows behind the barn. I recognized him, too. He was the man who had poked Nipo in the ribs with his rifle and frightened him so. He was shot down before he got halfway to the willows.

I don't believe any of the punchers saw the man behind the water tank, but he must have known he was trapped. I started circling to the left, but before I got very far, he jumped up and came straight at me. I believe he was trying to get to the house. He might have had some idea of using Nipo as a hostage. No one else was near enough to take a hand. I was glad it was that way.

He tried to rattle me, running me down like that, firing and sidestepping as he came, and he came close to it. One bullet scorched my skin like a red-hot iron, but all the rest of them let me go.

He was almost within touching distance when I brought him down with a shot that tore through his chest and dropped him in his tracks. I had fired five shots, including the one from the porch, and three of them had taken effect.

He had left behind the tools he had with him to get into the big iron box, but he hadn't left any of the cash behind. His pockets and money belt were stuffed with it, and he even had some of it loose under his shirt.

Mitch Hagen was still alive. They had walked in on him unawares and clubbed him down, then tied and gagged him.

We didn't get any of that rain, but we got some a week later, and it put a wry look on my father's face. "Wouldn't you know it," he muttered. "Now I got water and range, but no stock. I should've hung on. I won't be able to buy anything back at twice the price."

"Maybe you would let me fetch mine down here," I told him. "I've been worrying about them up there anyway."

"How many did you say you had?"

"Three thousand."

"I couldn't pay you for that many, Scrib."

"You can have 'em."

"Oh, no!"

"Well, I'll show you a way you can pay for them when the time comes." I gave Lennie a quick look to see if she knew what I meant and whether it would bring tears again.

There were no tears. She smiled and blushed and gave me a gentle look that told me all I wanted to know.

Later, I asked Nipo if he wanted to go along back. Lennie was in the kitchen, and he couldn't go to her to make his stand. So he went to my mother and took hold of her hand, then faced me with a black scowl and shook his head. My mother flushed with pleasure that he had come to her, and I said, in Kiowa, "You don't need to." ★ ★ ★

By Allan K. Echols

How far must a man run to keep the past from catching up? It might be measured in miles, Denison found. It could be in the scant inch between a man's hand and his sixgun!

NEVER TURN

WILLOW CREEK was two hundred miles and three years distant from the affair in San Saba, but Jess Denison had entertained little hope that he had outrun it. The past would always catch up with him and Ann; there would never be a future for them.

And now the past was coming up the sandy trail which had brought him and Ann along with the later prospectors who now made up the town above the diggings. Denison saw the man who could ruin him riding up. With a dead feeling inside him, he finished greasing the last wheel of the stagecoach and put his bucket of grease away in the stable back of the stage station.

The newcomer to the gold camp was a tall man with a loose seat in his saddle. He had eyes that were set too close together and that looked out on his surroundings with suspicion and a veiled contempt.

He pulled into the livery yard and dismounted in front of the stable. His gaze came to rest on Denison, who stood wiping the grease off his hands with a gunny sack. He hitched up his gunbelt, and licked his thin lips while he turned his discovery of Denison over in his mind.

Then he said, "Howdy, Benton."

"You must have somebody else in mind, mister. Name is Denison—Jess Denison."

The man thought this over for a moment, then laughed coldly.

"So? And you never saw me before? That won't do, Benton. We're kinfolks, remember? And I don't forget my kin."

Jess Denison saw his hopes of bluffing his way out disappearing. He saw the malignancy in this man's face. His voice had a touch of weariness in it.

"All right Miller. What do you want?"

Miller's lips were drawn down in contempt. "What's the matter, man? Afraid to wear your guns?"

"I'm not toting a star any more, Miller. Those days are over. I'm sick of all that business. Through with it."

"That's what you think! You're not through with me. I owe you for three years of hell in that stinking prison, mister. I thought of you when they laid the whip on my back. I brought you a present. *This!*"

His fist sent Denison back against the stable wall, and then down to the ground. Denison got up with the taste of blood in his mouth, with hot anger playing through him.

"I'll let that ride," he said. "Just get out of town—"

"*You'll* let it ride?" Miller mocked, and

"We can't run any more, Jess. We'll just have to face it now!"

YOUR BACK!

came in with his fists up. His eyes burned in bitter hatred; his lips were drawn back from his teeth. His fist shot toward Denison, and Denison ducked, let it slide over his shoulder.

"Afraid to fight me?" Miller taunted, and came in with both fists working.

Denison moved against him now, a bitter coldness in him, and the heat of an old rage as well. All these emotions he had kept deep in him were now coming up to the surface. And in him there was a feeling of release, for they had been dammed up too long, and it was good to get to express them in hard punishing action.

He slammed Miller back with a hard blow that forced a grunt out of the man. Miller came back with fists flying wildly, and Denison stepped into them, going forward, driving Miller back with punishing blows that thudded against hard bone and flesh.

Miller's face twisted painfully; the tone went out of his muscles, and his guard came down. Denison rushed into him then. Miller in desperation clutched at him, and they both went down together.

Rolling on the ground, Miller's strength came back to him and he was mean again. His knee came up into Denison's groin, and the pain rushed up through him and paralyzed him, left him grasping for breath. And in that moment's respite, Miller got his gun out.

Denison fought desperately with him for the gun, while Miller thumbed the hammer back. Denison got his hand around it, the webbing between his thumb and finger under the firing pin. Miller grunted and pulled the trigger, and pain shot up Denison's arm as the firing pin sank into flesh.

They fought on, and rolled over, and Miller got the gun up between their straining bodies. When he pulled the trigger this time, the report came low and muffled.

Again Miller's muscles relaxed; his hold slid off Denison, and he lay inert, blood on his shirt front, his gun still in his own outstretched hand.

Denison got to his feet and Miller rolled over on his back, his breath coming in sobbing jerks. Then Denison jerked the gun out of his hand.

His thumb brought the hammer back. His own sense of self-preservation told him to go on and finish the job; to close Miller's mouth forever, to get rid of this man who stood between him and his future. He had reason enough to kill Miller—he had excuse enough to make it safe to shoot the man who had attacked him.

Miller saw the thoughts playing on Denison's face, and he said, "Don't. Forget it. I'll let you alone."

It was not because of any promise from Miller; Miller's promise was worth nothing. It was something inside himself that held the trigger finger back. He could not kill a man lying on the ground. It wasn't in him to do it.

HE JAMMED the gun down into his waistband and turned to see the crowd running in through the gate from the street. Now the story would be out, now came the time for him to move on again. Bob Purdy was in the lead, wearing his star on his vest and carrying the burden of an unruly boomtown on his shoulders.

"What's the trouble, Denison?" he asked.

Miller looked up and answered. "That man ain't named Denison. That's Jess Benton. Ever hear of the marshal that shot Silver Cantrell and stole his wife? That's him."

"What's your name?" Purdy asked the man.

"Wade Miller. Ever hear of Ann Miller, the girl they called 'The Scarlet Verbena?' My brother's little girl and Silver Cantrell's wife. This man shot Silver, sent him to rot in prison, and took the girl."

"Yeah," Purdy said vaguely. "You went to prison with him."

"Railroaded. This man did it to get us out of the way. He wanted the girl. Well, Silver died in prison. I got a parole."

"—and came here to stir up trouble," Purdy answered. "Yes, I remember something about the case. Down in New Mexico." He turned and asked Denison. "Is he telling it right, Jess?"

"Not right. Just some of it, and that's wrong."

Purdy turned and said impatiently to the crowd, "Clear out, will you? Some of you go down to the drugstore and get Doc Hays up here with his stretcher."

The doctor came and looked Miller over. They took him on a stretcher up to the little hospital room Doc kept in the hotel.

Bob Purdy was alone with Jess Denison in the lot. They both walked silently back to a stall and leaned against it. Purdy said, "Jess, I'm sorry to hear this. I think a lot of you and Ann."

Denison had a lean grave face: he was carrying a lot of responsibility for a man not quite thirty.

"I guess it had to come out, Bob, but I didn't want it to, for Ann's sake. She doesn't deserve the dirt that's been slung at her."

"A fine woman, Jess."

"Yes, but they've butchered her—Miller and that first husband of hers."

"I see," Bob said, not seeing at all.

"This is it, Bob. It will come out, anyhow, so I want you to know the truth about it."

"I wasn't asking."

"Sometimes a man has to tell his side of a story. I was the marshal down at San Saba when the gold boom hit. Silver Cantrell had been working the trails—road agent—and he had taken quite a bit of money with his gun. Him and Miller.

"He bought a deadfall, saloon, gambling, and the like. And his wife sang in it. She was the daughter of Miller's brother, and had married Cantrell before she knew he was a crook. He used her as bait for the deadfall, singing. They called her 'The Scarlet Verbena,' because she always wore a red flower in her hair. Cantrell didn't want it to get out that she was married to him. You see, the customers thought she was single, and that packed the place for his crooked games.

"I was one of them that fell in love with her, myself. I was after Cantrell, but I didn't know she was his wife. Then the blowup came.

"Cantrell was rolling drunk prospectors, and I had a trap laid for him. He had been pushing Ann around pretty rough, too, but this night, she wouldn't play up to some drunk prospector with a heavy poke, and he took a few punches at her, then got the prospector cornered out in the dark and killed him. I caught him and Miller in the act that time, and later sent them up to prison.

"And I learned from Ann that night that she was Cantrell's wife. But she was through with him, and she got a divorce and we were married. We got out of that part of the country because people had got the idea that she was knowingly playing the suckers for Silver to knock off. She was just a country girl, and she didn't know a thing about what Silver was doing. The night he beat her up was the night she found out what he was, and she left him. They claimed I railroaded Cantrell to get his wife.

"Her reputation was ruined, of course, and so we came here looking for a place to start over. And now this."

They walked away from the stable. Bob Purdy said, "Jess, I believe you. And I believe in Ann. If this gets out it's going to hurt her. It's going to hurt her a lot."

"That's what I'm thinking," Jess Denison said.

BOB PURDY went away, and Jess went on into the stage station and attended to his day's business, numb with anxiety for Ann. Willow Creek was an old cowtown off the beaten trail, and he had come here as manager of the stage station because it was out of the way, because it was a good hiding

place. But the gold rush had come, and though it had made his job bigger and more important, it had brought this.

Crucifixion for Ann.

At the end of the day he went home, and Ann had put the baby to sleep and got his supper. She was a trim girl with a natural beauty and gaiety about her that was a wholesome thing to see. That spirit had been beaten down in her by Cantrell, but Jess had taken her and loved her, and he had made it bloom again. Everybody liked her here in Willow Creek: the wives of the ranchers and the few business men. For the first time in her life she had known what happiness meant.

He could not bring himself to tell her about Miller.

He went down the next morning to see the doctor. "How is Miller?" he asked.

The little old doctor said, "I don't know. He puzzles me. That bullet didn't penetrate the chest cavity—just skimmed along the outside. But the man doesn't seem to be recovering. Just lies like he was half-dead all the time."

People stopped to talk to him, and looked at him curiously. He knew that the town smelled a scandal, and wanted the facts.

Later in the day he bumped into Bob Purdy, and they talked a few minutes. Purdy looked at him speculatively. "This Miller . . . he tried to shoot you?"

"Yeah."

"And yet you had his gun in your hand and didn't finish him off, like you should have done for your own protection. I don't get it, Jess."

Denison tossed his cigarette out into the dust. "I don't either, but when I got his gun he was on his back. I just couldn't do it. I've got to live with myself."

"*Your* funeral," Purdy said. "But I'll do all I can. As soon as Doc says the man is well enough to move, I'll give him his choice of getting out of the country or standing trial for attempted murder. Be a few days yet, Doc says."

A few days later Purdy stepped into the stage station and spoke to Jess. "I guess I've been played for a sucker," he admitted. "This Miller flew the coop. Fooled Doc."

"How?"

"Way Doc figures it, Miller was smart enough to know we might pick him up as soon as he was able to be up and around. He acted like he was sicker and weaker than he was, so we'd let him alone till he was strong enough to travel. Then this morning, when Doc comes in to see him, he was gone. Jim Lassiter's horse and saddle are gone, too. It's a bad business, Jess. I'm sorry."

That evening Jess still did not have the heart to tell Ann about Miller. He found himself hoping that Miller would take the opportunity to get out of the Willow Creek country, but he knew it was merely wishful thinking. There were good pickings around here for a road agent. He kept an eye out for Miller but did not see him.

On Sunday night the church burned down, and on Monday the whole town turned out to rebuild it. Jess donated teams and freight wagons from the stage line. Ann got together with the women and threw a pie supper. The miners and everybody else in town bid up the price of pies and coffee to a total which paid for the nails and the specialized labor needed to rebuild the little community house of worship.

That night at home, Ann sat in Jess Denison's lap, and she was full of happiness. "I don't know what I'd do if we couldn't live here the rest of our lives," she said. "After what I went through I couldn't bear not being part of a community. It makes you feel like somebody; like you belonged to your neighbors, and were needed."

Now Jess heard her words with a sinking heart. He had heard no word of Miller since the man's disappearance, but he felt a sense of impending trouble building up in him, and he shuddered at the thought of what any such trouble might mean to Ann.

And then on a Sunday night . . .

THERE was a knock on the door, and when Jess opened it, Wade Miller and Silver Cantrell walked in, without waiting for an invitation. Cantrell was a tall man who had a flat chest and square shoulders and, with his heavy head of prematurely gray hair, was handsome in a reckless sort of way. He was a bluff man, one who could give you a smile while he cut your throat.

Denison saw Cantrell's arrogant smile, Miller's sly grin, and then turned and looked at his wife. Ann's face went white. Her mouth was opened as though she were going to cry out, but no sound came from her constricted throat.

Denison thought of his pistol, but it was in the bedroom, and these two armed men would not be thinking of letting him excuse himself to go and get it.

It was Cantrell who spoke first, with that bluff, aggressive laugh of his. "Well, surprise, huh? Howdy, folks."

Denison was speechless. Ann had sunk back in her chair as though too weak to sit up straight. All life seemed to have been drained out of her. Her eyes were closed as though to shut out the sight of this terrible pair.

"Miller said you were dead," Denison managed to say.

Cantrell was always the spokesman of any party he was in, and he spoke now, raising an assuring hand. "Take it easy, Jess. Nothing to worry about. Just wanted to have a talk with you."

"Listen," Denison answered sharply. "Ann got a divorce from you while you were in prison. I think you have done her enough damage."

Cantrell's smile was wide. He was always lifting his hand reassuringly. "Nothing like that. Let bygones be bygones. *Forget* that business. Ann's a fine girl, and I'm glad to see her happy."

"Then what do you want?"

"What's the matter? Don't you ever invite your guests to sit down?"

"You're not my guests. If Miller has come to finish his job, then do it and get it over. I don't have a gun on me."

"Ah, you're touchy, Jess. Jumpy. *Forget* it. Wade doesn't hold any hard feelings against you, do you, Wade?"

"Me? Not a chance. It was all my fault, that little ruckus."

"Then say what you've got to say and get moving," Denison answered.

Cantrell moved over to a chair with an air of being at home, and Wade Miller imitated him. "Nice place you've got here. Great little town; I hear you're both among its most respected citizens. Community spirit and all that sort of thing. Nice, huh?"

"What's on your mind?" Denison snapped. "Miller told me you were dead." He had said that before and Cantrell had ignored it. Now Cantrell laughed.

"You know how it is. In my business, a man doesn't want to advertise himself too much."

"What's your business now?"

"Why, it happens to be with you. I've had a man around prospecting, you might say, and I learn that you're managing the stage and freight station. They haul a lot of gold dust out of here, don't they?"

"What's that to you?"

"Gold dust is my business. You see, I'm figuring on taking a toll off the line, and I'll need your cooperation."

He said it so coolly and calmly that Denison wanted to get up and hit him, but the sight of Cantrell's gun dissuaded him. "So you want my help in robbing one of my stages. Is that what you're asking for?"

"Well, I wasn't exactly asking for it. You might say, I was telling you that you were going to have to do it."

"I don't see it that way."

"I'm surprised," Cantrell said with his mocking smile. "I don't have to remind you that you'd be sunk around here, you and the conventional, civic-minded young lady, your wife, if it were known that she was once the notorious Scarlet Verbena, bait for a deadfall, and that she betrayed her

crooked husband into the hands of the law in order to run away with the marshal that got rid of her husband for her. Or wouldn't that story make any difference?"

"What's that to you?"

"The important thing," Cantrell said, "is what it is to you. So, to lay it on the barrel head, I'm offering to forget that I'm a wronged husband. You get rid of the gun guard and drive the next load of gold out yourself. And of course, you'll be in the clear. We'll take care of everything."

"Including me?"

"Don't worry. We just want to make one haul, and then we're getting right out."

"I don't see what I would get out of it," Jess Denison said, "except the loss of my job."

"This is what you get out of it: we leave you alone from now on."

"And what are you going to do if I don't go along with you?"

"Well, what would this town expect a man to do to a wife who double-crossed him into prison, and to the lawman who helped her do it?"

DENISON turned these things over in his mind. He looked across the room and saw Ann sitting in her chair as though all the life had drained out of her veins, as though she were ready to die.

Those men could wreck them both, no matter what Jess decided. If he played along with them, they would come back for more. If he didn't, they could destroy him and Ann. . . .

And that was a thing he could not stand. Not even in his thoughts.

"What's your deal?" he asked.

"Just like I say," Cantrell answered. "We'll work it out just like clockwork. And then Miller and me will pull our freight, and that will be the last you will see of us."

Jess Denison got to his feet. "You've got me over a barrel," he said. "What's on your mind?"

"It is simple enough. You just fire your gun guard the day the gold shipment goes out, and then you find that you won't be able to replace him in time, so you go along yourself. You can put up a kind of fight to make it look good. And that's all there is to it."

"Sounds simple enough," Denison said. "I might be able to work it."

"You had better be able to work it."

When Cantrell and Miller left, Ann rushed into Denison's arms. "What are we going to do, Jess?" she cried.

He told her, and she leaned against him for strength, as she had done during these hard years. Her hair was as black as the inside of a cave, and her face was like ivory, and in her there was a simple love and faith in the man who had taken her out of her own private hell.

"I don't know yet, Ann. People are good at heart, but there's a lot of cruelty in them, too. They'll talk, when they hear of this, and they'll hurt you. I don't know, Ann. I just can't let them hurt you like this! We could go away."

She was a person who lived in the here and now, who wanted her days to run smoothly and peacefully, but she showed him now that there was strength inside her. "We can't run any more, Jess. I've had enough of that sort of thing. We'll just have to stay and face it. Maybe Silver won't talk, after all. That would be such a cruel thing to do!"

"He *would* do it if I didn't live up to my bargain. He's vindictive enough to do anything. I'm not fooled about his forgiving me."

"Are you trying to say that he won't live up to his part of the bargain?"

"I don't expect him to. I have to handle it with that in mind."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll have to think of something," he told her. "You just forget it, Ann. I've got until Tuesday."

THE next evening after he had closed the stage station, Jess Denison got his horse and rode out of town. He passed along the trail to Buxton, along which the stage was scheduled to take the gold on Tuesday evening.

He could take Ann and ride out on this trail and leave Willow Creek behind; he could take her and run. But he would be running away from everything he had built up for her, from everything that had ever meant peace and contentment for her. And if he ran now, he would have to keep on running—they would never be able to put roots into the ground and build the things that he wanted for himself and for her.

He came to the creek, to the point where the road dipped between walls of boulders and brush before crossing the shallow water. This was the spot Cantrell had picked for the fake holdup, a place where they could lie in concealment until the stage came along, where the horses would stop to drink, leaving the vehicle wide open for attack.

This was the place, he thought bitterly, that Cantrell and Miller had picked to kill him. He had no hope that they would be satisfied with merely taking the gold and leaving him and Ann in peace. Miller had shown him how deeply entrenched was their hatred for sending them to prison.

He turned back toward town and got home some time after dark. Ann was out helping the neighbor women decorate the inside of the new church. Alone in the house, he went into the bedroom and opened the bottom drawer of his dresser, bringing out the pistol and holster he had not worn since he left San Saba. He cleaned and oiled the gun, and worked vaseline into the holster until it was slick on the inside.

He strapped the holster around him, and practiced his draw. It was awkward at first, but his reflexes were still there, and after a while he felt that he had as much of his timing as he would ever recapture. His draw wasn't as fast as it had been back in the days when he depended on it to keep alive, but it would do. It would have to do.

He left the house, wearing his gun, because he did not want Ann to know his decision and start worrying about him.

Passing the saloon, Redmond stopped him. Redmond was a gambler: he had money tied up in a saloon and in this and that so long as it was crooked. "Hiya, Jess," he said. "Say, I want to talk to you."

Denison waited suspiciously, and Redmond went on. "I'm thinking about opening up a new place, games, dancing and the like. I hear that you and your wife have had some experience along this line."

"What do you mean?" Denison's voice was like ice.

"You know. The Scarlet Verbena. I could use a gal like her—"

Jess Denison got the man by the shirt front, and his fist crunched into the man's face. Redmond picked himself up out of the gutter slowly and started dusting himself off. "I didn't know you felt that way about it," he said.

"You know it now," Jess answered, and took his gun on down to the stage station.

The next day was a busy one. The bank, which had been cashing gold dust, brought a strongbox of leather pouches to the station to be sent on to Buxton. Jess talked to Frank Talley, the driver, and to Bob Purdy.

Jess didn't go home to dinner. He was avoiding Ann's anxious queries as to what he was going to do. At five o'clock, he mounted the box of the yellow stage in front of the station and took on three miners and a small batch of luggage which went into the rear boot. He brought the iron strongbox and threw it up onto the stage where it would ride under his feet. The box was locked, and inside it were the dozen leather pouches.

And the pouches were not filled with gold dust, but with sand. Jess had taken the bank into his confidence—the gold dust had gone out on the stage the night before.

He pulled the lumbering stage out of

town in the late part of the afternoon while the usual crowd had come to loiter in the shade of the station. Alone on the box, he drove the four-horse team with a tight hand, while his sharp gaze picked out every rock, every hiding place, along the dusty trail the stage had to follow.

Ahead of him the dark line of trees marked the creek crossing, and the sun was just sinking behind him when he slowed the team down on the approach to the ford.

This was the spot arranged for the robbery. This was the place he had examined when he had ridden out last evening. And this was the place where his and Ann's future would be decided once for all.

He slowed the team down as they rolled toward the water's edge in the shade of the overhanging trees. He brought them to a stop so that both teams were in the creek with water flowing knee-deep around their legs.

AND then two men came out of the brush on horseback, one from either side of the road. They had bandannas over their faces so that only their eyes showed, and they had drawn pistols.

The man who spoke was Cantrell, his silver hair showing under the brim of his hat. "All right, mister. Drop the reins and get your hands up. This is a holdup."

The second man was not Miller: he didn't have Miller's form. And this was as Denison had expected, for Cantrell had collected information in town, and Miller hadn't been moving around town to collect.

Denison obeyed the orders; he took a turn around the brake handle with the reins, then lifted his hands.

But he did not raise them above his head. He jerked his gun and jumped off the box, landing on the ground at the water's edge with his weapon out and up. He turned his back on Cantrell and his partner, spinning around to face a rock which he had examined the evening before.

And raising his body from its concealment behind the rock, Wade Miller was lifting a rifle to shoot him in the back, trying to drygulch him. His pistol roared, and Wade Miller's body came upward in full view like a jack-in-the-box, then crashed over backward out of sight in the brush.

Denison continued his turn and caught the second man in the chest with another bullet. It knocked the man out of his saddle, and his horse bolted with the dead man's foot hung in the stirrup, his body dragging and bouncing in the water as the horse crossed the creek.

Then Denison felt something hit him, and when he recovered from the shock of it he was down in the dust with his whole left side paralyzed. And Silver Cantrell's gun was smoking as he raised it again.

Denison lifted himself on his elbow and triggered his weapon with a slow precision. And, as the ground began to swim around him, he shot again, and yet again. His vision was getting blurred, and through the haze of it he saw Silver Cantrell falling off his horse.

Things were getting dark for him when he heard the hooves of horses moving, and remembered that he had arranged with Bob Purdy and Frank Talley to follow him. Then he drifted off into darkness.

When he came to his senses he was in his own bed, and Ann was sitting beside him putting cold cloths to his head—and crying softly.

His left arm was bandaged to his side, and there was a great weakness in him, but he reached up with his good arm and brought her head down to him and kissed her.

"Why did you take that chance without telling me?" she asked. There was disapproval in her voice, but pride, too. "You shouldn't have done it!"

"Wasn't it worth it?" he asked her. "You're free now. Free of everything—except me."

And because she was happy, she cried some more. ★ ★ ★

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The Sheriff Throws His Punch

Sheriff Daley figured the best cure for the local bandit epidemic was to explode the town's biggest dance in a mad shambles of crashing crockery, craniums and Colts!

Leaning far back, Red heaved the bowl through the air.

IF ANYBODY had told Red Daley that someday he'd be sitting with a group of females and the town sissy sipping a cup of tea, Red would have roared with laughter. And maybe demand he be bought a shot at the nearest saloon with the excuse he'd need it to settle his stomach after such a remark.

By Cy Kees

Or, if the young sheriff of tough Baker county was in one of his rare sour moods, he might have given the speaker a black eye. Anyhow, it was about the last thing Red Daley could ever have imagined himself doing.

Red balanced the cup on his knee and stared down at the pale liquid. The only good thing he could find about the tea was that it had been poured by Sandra Sanderson. But she had taken her blue eyes, blonde hair and nice slim figure across the room, leaving him with the damned stuff.

Vaguely, he wondered if it would be proper to drag out his red handkerchief and mop the nervous sweat off his forehead. Remembering the shape it was in, he decided not to.

". . . Don't you agree, Sheriff?"

"Huh—come again?" Red said, lifting his eyebrows. He choked. "I mean, pardon me, ma'am." Mrs. Beechruff glowered down at him, then pointed her nose skyward. She struggled continually to keep her place at the head of the town society, such as it was.

"I was saying, these robberies simply must stop," she said, in a stern voice. "No business house is safe anymore. Isn't there anything you can do?"

"I'm doing the best I can," Red said seriously. "Believe me, I've got my gut full of . . . I mean, it's . . . it sure is a fright, ain't it?"

"Yes, it certainly is," Mrs. Beechruff snapped. She babbled on, but Red forgot her in his nervousness and sneaked a glance at Sandra. He noted how close she was sitting to Hamilton Newfelt, and jealousy knifed through him.

Ever since Sandra had stepped off the stagecoach and come to him for directions, he'd been in love with her. Fresh from the East as she was, Red had figured on giving her a good impression by always being right on hand to help. And then hope she noticed him . . .

But Newfelt had the same idea. And, Red admitted bleakly to himself, Newfelt was about a hundred times more qualified to do that than he was. A perfect dresser, smooth talker, good looking, the new cashier at the bank, Newfelt was everything he was not. And Sandra seemed to realize it. But Red was never one to go down without a fight.

So when Sandra came into his office all excited about giving a tea to make plans for the church charity fund, Red had dared say he'd go. She'd made such a sweet picture with her eyes all lighted that he probably couldn't have refused anyhow. Now, too late, Red wished he was down in the Silver Spur Saloon cooling some drunk. Or facing some mad, shotgunning bandit. Anything simple like that . . .

Handling his teacup delicately, Newfelt was telling how he thought the recent chain of robberies should be stopped. Ill at ease because he was sheriff and should have caught the thieves, Red tried to ignore him until one name came into the talk.

"Of all the shady characters in town, I think the most logical suspect is that uncouth Tag Flaggerty," Newfelt stated. Red glared at him. Not just because Tag was his best friend, but because, while a little rough, Tag was honest to the bone.

"I think you misjudge Tag," Red said, trying to be polite about it. "He might raise a little hob now and then, but he'd never steal a dime from anybody. He's the most honest bartender I ever seen." Newfelt shrugged, a thin smile coming to his lips.

"Since you never caught any of the robbers, how can you be so sure, Sheriff?" he asked. "It appears to me you tend to take the side of the rougher element in too many cases." Red tried hard to control his quick temper, but it flared.

"How would you handle 'em?" he asked softly. Newfelt rubbed soft white hands together.

"I'd take stern measures to see they stayed in line," he said.

"Ah . . . what would you use?"

Newfelt straightened in his chair, pursed thin lips. "Of course I'm not equipped for the job," he said stiffly. "That's why they hire men like you."

"Then why don't you let me do it—*my* way?" Red asked, with a tight grin. Sandra Sanderson stood up, and the stare she gave him was anything but friendly.

"If you're going to stay, Red," she said, "I'll have to ask you to be polite to the rest of the guests." Hot blood surged up to his face, and Red's temper flared higher.

"He called one of my best friends a thief," Red snapped. "Am I supposed to sit here and take that?"

"I can't say that I don't agree with Hamilton about that . . . that terrible Flaggerty," Sandra said. "If you could only see the way he leers at me when I pass him on the street."

"The same way Newfelt there does," Red said. "Only he's just hypocrite enough to hide it." Newfelt rose to his feet at the charge, gasped, but Red noticed he wasn't in any hurry to get started across the room. Then he was staring into Sandra's blue eyes again—eyes now smoky with anger.

"I'll have to ask you to leave right now," Sandra said, low and furiously. "And I hope you don't expect to be thrown out bodily. Or is that the custom in your set?"

Red didn't know about that set stuff, but he knew he was glad enough to leave. Sore at himself, at Newfelt, at Flaggerty for being the cause of his trouble, he put his teacup down and left. It was his first quarrel with Sandra, and it left him feeling more dismal than he had ever been before. Red stomped down to the Rock Dust saloon to have a drink and think it over.

ON THE way, Red spotted Tag Flaggerty crossing to head him off. It surprised and rankled him, and Red stared at the sidewalk, pretending not to notice the bartender. Any other time, Flaggerty would be in his room asleep, getting ready for his evening's work. But when you didn't want to see his ugly face . . .

"Say, how was the gentleman's tea?" Flaggerty called sarcastically. "If it's got a stiff enough jolt, I might run over and nail a cup." Red glowered at him.

"You'll stay away from her and mind your poor manners," he snapped. "You get gay around her, and I'll clap you so far back in the cooler, they'll have to pipe you air."

"My, my, ain't we salty this morning?" Flaggerty laughed. "I thought I was in love with her, too, when she first came. But I got over it, and so will you. Just too mannerable, that's all. They can sure be a bother." Flaggerty jerked his head toward the saloon. "Come on in and have a drink, and I'll tell you what a stew that foolish politeness gets you into."

Wishing Flaggerty would shut up, Red walked with him to the Rock Dust saloon. With a drink in front of him, Flaggerty warmed up to his subject.

"I had a gal once that was really going to make a gentleman outta me," he said. "I was game, but you know, Red, that sure got tiresome. Payin' mind to a lot of half-baked sissies that couldn't eat a meal 'thout a napkin to swipe at their lips everytime you really got interested in the grub. No sirree, you want to steer clear of that, Red. I barely made it out myself." Flaggerty tossed the liquor off before he went on.

"I was doin' fair well that time, when one night at a supper they called dinner, it just roiled my gut too much. One jigger there excused hisself so damned often, askin' for stuff he could've reached without no strain atall, I just up and pitched him under the table. Told him to stay there till he learned enough to let a man eat his meal in peace." Red grinned and shook his head.

"And she quit you then?"

"Hell, no," Flaggerty said. "She got so

mad, she slammed a hunk of pie at my head, and I quit her. That was just too much bad manners for me!"

Hearing Flaggerty's rambling, Red cheered up again. If he'd try extra hard from now on, he thought, he might be able to smooth things off with Sandra. Anyhow, he hoped so. Suddenly, a small kid pushed through the batwings, came up to him, serious and round-eyed.

"Hey, Sheriff," he said, and he was excited. "Hamilton Newfelt says come right up to the bank. Somebody robbed the safe up there while he was gone to a—"

Cursing, Red lunged out of the door. Another safe robbery. If he didn't put a stop to them, he'd have to look someplace else for a job. On the dead run, Red pounded up the sidewalk towards the bank.

It would be the same as the others, he thought grimly. A safe opened without trouble, the money gone. Whoever was getting the money was an expert, somebody who could open the safes by listening to the clicking of the combination locks. They just didn't leave clues like they would if they blew them. Hamilton Newfelt waited in the bank door, a dark scowl on his face.

"I'm glad to see somebody was able to rout you out of your daydreams, Sheriff," he said sarcastically. "While you're wandering around in a daze, somebody robbed the bank. Got over five thousand dollars!"

"Wasn't there anybody around?" Red asked. "Anybody that could've seen—"

"No, I had the bank locked because Mr. Davis went over to Landrey for a couple of days." Newfelt shook his head. "He gave me permission before he left to lock up so I could attend the tea, and now—"

"How they get in if you had it locked?"

"There's marks on one of the back window sills, and the window was open," Newfelt said. "Just shows how brazen whoever is doing this stealing has become. In broad daylight!"

Red scratched his head.

"Must have been somebody that's acquainted with the town," he said slowly. "Somebody that knew you'd be at that tea today." Red recalled Tag Flaggerty's remark about the tea, throttled the quick suspicion it made in him. He went to the back window, examined it. It looked like it'd been forced with some kind of small iron bar. Newfelt tagged close behind.

"Have you seen Tag Flaggerty this morning?" he asked. Red didn't want to give him the satisfaction of knowing they were in the saloon together while the robbery was going on. Staring Newfelt right in the eye, Red shook his head.

"No, I guess he's sleepin' now."

Newfelt's eyes brightened.

"Oh, no he isn't," Newfelt snapped. "I saw him skulking away when I came up to the bank. And he had a bag in his hand!"

Red tensed, trying to hide the sudden excitement at the cashier's words. Newfelt didn't know that at that time, Flaggerty was giving his opinions of manners at the Rock Dust saloon. Newfelt was lying!

"I'll have me a little talk with him," Red said. For fear he'd give himself away, he looked away from Newfelt. The question hammered at his brain. Why did Newfelt lie? *Why*? Why, unless . . . His heart beating fast, Red guessed the answer.

NEWFELT had taken the money himself. He'd probably had it planned all along. With the sheriff at the party, there was nothing to stop him from blaming it on Flaggerty. Newfelt had planted the seeds of suspicion at the party. Ordinarily, Flaggerty would've been asleep in the back of the Rock Dust Saloon with no alibi. And that meant Newfelt had probably done the other robbing too, Red thought. Now, quickly, he had to find a way to prove it.

"Looks like this'll be tough to pin on anybody," Red said, baiting the cashier. "Nothing like a clue." Newfelt glared.

"You arrest Tag Flaggerty and I'll say plenty to prove it against him," he said. "What other reason would he have to be sneaking around the bank at this hour of the day?"

"Well, there's other reasons for a person to be wandering around," Red said, in mock defense. "But I'll have a talk—"

"You either arrest him," Newfelt flared, "or I'll see that you lose your position. I'm getting tired of having these robberies go on, just because you want to protect your friends." Red hung his head.

"Well, if you put it that way," he said, pretending to agree. "Guess I'll have to swear out a warrant for him." All the while he talked, he thought desperately for a way to trap Newfelt. Not finding any, he left the bank and walked back to the saloon. The bartender told him Flaggerty had gone to bed in the back. Red went to Flaggerty's room and woke him up.

"Go right ahead and arrest me," Flaggerty muttered sleepily, after Red told him about it. "That jail cot couldn't have a damn bit harder-chawin' bedbugs than this one. Man, but they got jaws!"

Trying to look like the grim lawman taking a dangerous desperado in, Red herded Flaggerty up the street to the jail. A crowd followed, and Hamilton Newfelt joined them, a smug grin on his face. He followed the two into the jail office. When he had locked Flaggerty up, Red turned to him.

"Flaggerty says he was in back of the saloon asleep when you thought you saw him around the bank," Red said.

"Sheriff, I'm positive it was him," Newfelt said emphasizing each word. "Now whose word are you going to take, his or mine?"

"Guess I'll have to take yours," Red mumbled.

"You bet you will!" Newfelt snapped. "Just lucky we caught him before all that money comes in for the church charity drive tonight."

So that was it! Red thought, trying to hide his excitement. That was why Newfelt had robbed the bank today. He planned on getting he fund money that night, and then would probably skip town. While the bank owner, Mr. Davis, was gone to Landrey! Trying to hide his knowledge, Red frowned toward Flaggerty in the cell.

"I sure appreciate your help in catching that scoundrel," he said, almost grinning at the mock hangdog look Flaggerty gave him. "I'll see if I can get him to confess today."

"Well, that certainly is a welcome change in your attitude, Sheriff," Newfelt said, with another of those smug grins that Red was itching to wipe off his smooth face.

"Since you have this prisoner to watch, I don't suppose I'll see you at the charity dance tonight?"

Right then, Red resolved to be watching all right—watching every dollar they took in—and *close*. But he shook his head.

"Might drop in for a few minutes, but that'd be about all," he said. "I'll let you know how I come out with Flaggerty." Newfelt nodded, and with a satisfied grin, walked out of the office.

"You lie faster'n a drifter can empty free drinks," Flaggerty grumbled. "Hurry up and get my lunch. I'm hungry. And while you're at it, bring along a bottle of that Black Mule whiskey I keep for myself." Red grinned at him.

"You'll take what you can get," he said. "Two meals a day's all the county allows for its lawbreakers. I might slip you an extra though if you keep your big yap shut!"

"You're damn right you will," Flaggerty growled. "Either that or I'm going to tell the whole town that you were in cahoots with me and raked off half the profits on those robberies!"

Red glared at him, but he decided to get the whiskey. Tag Flaggerty would be just ornery enough to do it too, just to watch

him sweat. He turned, and met Sandra Sanderson in the doorway.

AWED as he always was by her beauty, Red retreated back into his office. Sandra looked neither mad nor friendly, just coolly distant. From his cell, Flaggerty gave a long, low whistle.

"Man, Red, if you'd told me I'd get visitors like that, I'd of confessed a month ago!"

Trying to ignore Flaggerty, Red made an effort to look like a gentleman sheriff. Sandra paused uncertainly in the middle of the room.

"I forgot to tell you at the party, Sheriff," she said. "We had planned on having you serve the punch at the dance tonight. Would you do that?"

To try and get back in good with her, Red wanted to say yes in the worst way to anything she asked of him. But to serve that punch would mean he couldn't keep a close eye on Newfelt at the dance. Regretfully, he shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Sandra, really I am, but—"

"Hey, she's close enough, Red," Flaggerty called from the cell. "Why don't you give her a big kiss!"

Sandra gasped, and a flush stole up the smooth skin of her face. She was so close, Red thought, and her lips . . . Mad as he was at Flaggerty for the suggestion, a terrible temptation shot through him.

Red took a deep breath and kissed her on the mouth.

It was terrifically warm and sweet, but immediately Red was terribly sorry, and he felt hot blood rushing to his head. He'd done it on impulse, without thinking, he wanted to tell her, but he couldn't get any words out. For a long moment, Sandra stared at him. Then her flush deepened, and she whirled away. Red followed close behind her.

"I'll . . . I'll be glad to serve that punch for you," he said miserably. "And, believe me, nobody's going to spike it with any liquor either. I'll run that punch stand just the way you want it to be run."

Until she was in the doorway, Sandra didn't answer. Then she still stared, as if into space, and she looked like she was deep in thought.

"I'll depend on you then, Red," she said, and walked out.

His brain whirling with confused thoughts, Red walked slowly back to his desk. Flaggerty's mocking chuckle drifted to him.

"I'll serve the punch," Flaggerty mimicked. "I'll put on an apron. I'll be a mommy's little boy if you want it." Flaggerty roared. *"Hell,* I thought you were tough!"

"Oh, shut that big yap!" Red snapped, wishing he'd never locked Flaggerty up. Then the bartender wouldn't have ruined whatever chance he had left to win Sandra. But one thing she had said, kept hammering at his brain, gave him a ray of hope when everything seemed lost.

Before he had kissed her, she had called him sheriff, in that cold, distant way she had when she was mad. Afterward, it had been Red. And, somehow, he felt now like she hadn't been distant at all . . .

Ignoring Flaggerty's repeated attempts to heckle him, Red resigned himself to serving the punch. He shouldn't really, he knew, because it would be hard to keep an eye on Newfelt from behind the punch bowl. But he couldn't refuse Sandra either, not when he stood on the thin edge of losing whatever chance he might have for her. All afternoon, Red sat behind his desk, wishing the evening would come quickly, whatever it might bring.

Long before it was time for the dance to start, he was tensed up, nervous from waiting. He walked over a little early, for any instructions Sandra might have.

She sat there in a simple white dress, and Red's heart pounded at the wholesome sight. Hamilton Newfelt stood beside her, and, silently, Red cursed himself for not

coming sooner. As he stepped closer, Newfelt's smirk turned to a scowl.

"I thought you were going to watch the prisoner," he said, in a surly tone.

"I did too—till Sandra asked me to serve the punch," Red said, grinning. "She said she didn't want you slippin' any rot-gut moonshine in it." Sandra gazed at him, her eyes unreadable in the light from the lamps.

"Please don't bicker tonight, Red," she said in a low voice, and Red wished he hadn't said anything. He took his station behind the punch bowl, and watched Sandra go to the door to let in the first of the dancers.

The charge for the dance was any donation they'd give for the church, and Red saw right away they were going to be generous. It worried him, but then he had to start serving punch, and he had his hands full with that.

It looked so simple when somebody else did it, but he found it took all his attention to direct the flow of punch from the ladle into the small cups. Sweating, trying to ignore heckling from the cowpunchers, Red continued to scoop from the huge crock punch bowl.

There was just no emptying it. Between fighting off curious kids, cowpunchers intent on spiking the juice with their pocket flasks, and doling out drinks, he couldn't begin to keep track of Newfelt. More people came in until the place was packed, noisy, and Red knew the donation money would be piling up.

If Newfelt was guilty as he suspected, he'd try to get his hands on the money as soon as he figured it was about all in. Red glanced at the door for the hundredth time.

JUST then, Sandra Sanderson and Newfelt walked out, arm in arm. Jealousy seeped through him, and Red stifled an ugly urge to turn the punch bowl over and call it a night. He could just hear Newfelt's silky voice in the darkness telling Sandra sweet things he'd like to be saying himself. Impatient for them to come back, Red watched the door intently.

It was a long time, but he spotted them as soon as they came back in. Sandra walking a few feet ahead now, towards the box where the donation money was gathered. Probably planning on taking it to a safe place, Red thought. But with Newfelt . . .

Red stared. Sandra was hurrying now, scooping the money into a bag, moving towards the door again, with Newfelt close behind. All at once a terrible fear shot through him for Sandra if she went into the darkness alone with the cashier. Newfelt might not be guilty, but . . .

"Hey, Sandra, wait!" Red yelled, above the noise of the crowd. She hesitated, but Newfelt seemed to urge her on. Urgency seized him, and Red tried to push his way around the punch stand. But the thick crowd blocked him off.

In a frenzy of fear for her, he looked around, desperately, and his eyes froze on the big crock punch bowl. Impulsively, Red reached out and picked it up.

For an awful second while he held it up, a thought hammered through his brain. If Newfelt turned out to be innocent, Sandra would never forgive him. Then, leaning far back, Red heaved the bowl.

It sprayed punch over the room in its arching flight. Eyes bulging, Newfelt saw it coming and ducked—exactly the wrong way! It smacked him square in the head and shattered to pieces.

Without a sound, Newfelt collapsed on the floor. Horrified, Red stared at Sandra, knowing with bleak finality that there was no hope for him anymore. Then, eyes glistening, she ran for him, straight into his arms!

"Oh, Red," she sobbed. "I was hoping and praying you'd find out. Oh, how did you know?"

"*Eh*?" Red mumbled. "Know what?"

"That he had that little gun pointed at

(*Please continue on page 66*)

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It is a lamentable fact, but none the less true, that the vast majority of people living to-day do not know what health is, because they have never been healthy. Many of them imagine that they are healthy as long as they have no definite disease or illness. This is far from being the case! That is merely Negative Health. No one could ever confuse it with Positive Health who has once experienced the latter! Positive Health is not merely the absence of illness or disease, and those processes that wear out and destroy the bodily tissues; it is the active presence of a 100 per cent. efficient endocrine co-ordination, which daily rejuvenates and renews the tissues. It fills the body at all times with a boundless reserve of energy that makes itself known by a delightful feeling of slight tension—a feeling of being "wound-up," instantly ready to go anywhere and tackle anything! This sensation of exhilarating vitality indicates the presence of untiring strength and radiant health which will outlast the passage of the years. People who have this Positive Health do not age as others do, but seem to remain perpetually young and vital. They are, by the accident of chance, the lucky possessors of perfect endocrine co-ordination. Now this glorious health and happiness can be YOURS!

GLANDULAR Treatment automatically normalises endocrine function, eliminates endocrine imbalance and secures perfect endocrine co-ordination! That means 100 per cent. Perfect Positive Health for YOU!

If GLANDULAR Treatment can do THIS for a man of 76, what can it do for YOU?

Read this extraordinary story :

"At 66 I was a decrepit old man with no trace left of my youthful vigour. My body was senile, what hair I had was white, my skin was yellow, wrinkled, dry, my eyes were dull and lacking colour—my senility was distressing. I was an old crock with one foot in the grave.

"Then came the great change. I heard of British Glandular Products Ltd., and took their 'TESTRONES' Tablets. In a few weeks I was a new man!

"To-day I have, at 76, more vim and vigour than I had at 30, my incredible vitality astonishes even me. I eat like a boy and sleep like a child, I read small print without glasses.

"Once again at 76, I am experiencing the joys of life to the full.

"(Signed) Digby H. de Burgh,
Port Washington, British Columbia."

The second of the two pictures reproduced above represents Mr. de Burgh as he is to-day in his eightieth year

Answer these Questions

ARE YOU AS STRONG AND VITAL AS YOU COULD WISH?

ARE YOU BECOMING STRONGER AND HEALTHIER, HOLDING YOUR OWN, OR DECLINING?

DO YOU SUFFER FROM LACK OF ENERGY?

ARE YOU QUICKLY FATIGUED?

NEVER REALLY WELL?

ARE YOU RUN DOWN, EXHAUSTED, OR OVERWORKED?

HAVE YOU SUFFERED FROM NEURASTHENIA OR NERVE STRAIN?

ARE YOU "NERVY" IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

ARE YOU IMPATIENT, A WORRIER, EASILY UPSET?

HAVE YOU SUFFERED LOSS OR WEAKNESS OF YOUR VITAL POWERS?

GLANDULAR TREATMENT CAN PUT MATTERS RIGHT. IT IS BASED NOT UPON THEORY BUT UPON ASCERTAINED, SCIENTIFIC FACT!

How to find out more about it!

British Glandular Products Ltd. have specialised in the supply of Glandular and Hormone extracts since 1929, and their "TESTRONES" Tablets for the male sex, and "OVERONES" Tablets for the female sex, have brought untold benefits to countless numbers of people of both sexes and ALL ages for many years past.

There is no need for complicated expensive treatments—our easily assimilable gland extracts in tablet form will in a short while have a revolutionary effect on your general health and vitality.

Fill in coupon below and enclose 3d. stamp for booklet—"The Essence of Life"—giving you further particulars of these remarkable treatments—or send 15/- for trial bottle of 100 Male or 100 Female Gland Tablets, which will give you that radiant vitality and maximum efficiency, which alone makes life worth living.

To BRITISH GLANDULAR PRODUCTS LTD. (Dept. PMA. 447), 37 CHESHAM PLACE, LONDON, S.W.1
Please send free Booklet—"The Essence of Life," a 3d. stamp is enclosed—OR Please send to following address :
(*a*) 100 "TESTRONES" Tablets (Male); (*b*) 100 "OVERONES" Tablets (Female), for which I enclose 15/- herewith.

(Please write in BLOCK LETTERS and STRIKE OUT tablets NOT required).

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

WHEN THE WEST DIED

This was the winter the West would never forget . . . when the only creatures that grew fat and healthy were coyotes and vultures. . . .

By Lee Floren

THERE never was a freeze in Utah and Wyoming, to compare with the terrible winter of 1886 and 1887. That fall, an old Gros Ventres Indian came into Fort Keogh, out of the present town of Miles City, Montana, and he said, "Great white owl, he come down from North. Many cattle die this winter."

The Gros Ventres, having seen the great snow owl, made no understatement. On November 17th, the storm hit. Cattle being driven to loading pens on the Northern Pacific and other Western railroads, died within sight of stockyard loading-pens. Three years of drouth and short grass, in addition to the terrible storm, took a quick toll.

Sleet and snow, driven by blizzard winds, swirled across Utah and Wyoming and Montana, extending as far east as Nebraska and Kansas. Cattle drifted with the wind and many head died because they ran into drift-fences and the barbwire of the nesters.

And in the spring their emaciated carcasses were piled high behind illegal barbwire drift fences.

When the November storm finally broke, there were a few days of cold, brittle sunshine and then, around the first part of December, the winter started in cold earnest. Snow drifted over grass short even in the summertime because of the drouth. Horses grazed on sidehills, pawing through the snow, and cattle followed like scavengers, for cattle do not paw snow as does a horse. And behind the weak cattle came other scavengers that waited for the cattle to drop and die—the bold prairie wolf and his slinking little pal, the coyote.

In February a Chinook wind, that warm *foehn* wind caused by adiabatic pressure, came singing across the snow and ice, melting it and causing water-puddles to form on the range. Cattlemen, happy that the Chinook had finally come, had their joy immediately squelched. A cold wave came behind the Chinook. Water changed to ice and snow came to cover the ice. The range was in worse shape than before the Chinook. Now the few spears of grass were covered with ice. Horses pawed down to the ice, moving the snow, but the ice covered the grass—and even the hard hoofs of wild horses could not penetrate the ice-covered foothills and prairies.

Now cattle and horses both died of starvation. At this time cowmen did not put up hay as they do today. They always turned their stock out on open range—government-owned land—to graze until spring.

According to some historians, the terrible winter of 1886-87 marked the end of free range for the cowmen.

WHEN Spring finally came—and Spring was late that year—the calf-roundups conducted by various big outfits showed losses as high as fifty percent. Some outfits, in fact, claimed they had even lost seventy percent of their stock to the blizzards. The calf tally, of course, was very small.

(Please continue on page 64)

WHEN THE WEST DIED

(Continued from page 63)

Indians also suffered. They froze in their cold wigwams and they lost their herds of ponies, and without horses an Indian was indeed a lost human. The shaggy buffaloes, by this time growing very scarce, had migrated south; wildings, moving by some hidden prompting of Nature toward the South and warmer surroundings. But even at that, the terrible cold cut deeply into the small stocks of existing buffalo.

Without the buffalo to feed him and clothe him, the Indian was doomed—therefore the winter of 1886-87 helped the Government force the Indians onto reservations, for a hungry man does not want to carry on a war.

On the Sun River, northwest of the present town of Great Falls, Montana, Charles M. Russell, then a youth, but later destined to become the one great Western artist, was wintering five thousand head of cattle on open range.

Somehow, word got to him from Great Falls, that the owner wanted to know how his herd was wintering. Russell did not write the owner a letter. Instead, he drew on a postcard the picture of a bony, emaciated cow, dying on its feet of cold and starvation, standing in the snow and watching a coyote who circled it, waiting for the cow to die. This he sent to the owner, who sat in a warm hotel in Great Falls.

Under it he had written, *Waiting for a Chinook, or the Last of the Five Thousand.* Today that pen and ink drawing—along with its creator—is famous in the West and, in fact, all over the United States.

Cattlemen learned, to their great sorrow and financial loss, that they would have to cut and put up hay for the winters.

The lesson was a costly one, but the cowman, in a sense, profited by his grim and costly experience. Today the West produces more cattle—and better cattle—than it did in 1886. And today very few head are lost to winterkill. ★ ★ ★

WESTERN WONDERLAND

By BESS RITTER

IT'S not true that "there's nothing unusual about the West any more." That is, not as long as the most frustrating river, the largest monument and the oddest graveyard in the country can be found only after crossing the muddy Mississippi.

The monument is the famous Texan San Jacinto shaft near Houston. It is twelve feet higher than the one in Washington. It cost over $1,000,000 to erect. It was built to remind, perpetually, the people of the state that Sam Houston defeated Santa Anna at the battle of San Jacinto in 1836, thereby freeing Texas from the Government of Mexico.

The river—the Snake—meanders through Idaho. It contains approximately $2,000,000 worth of gold. But the metal will probably never be mined, because each "nugget" is so small that it would take over five million to equal a nickel in value. Hundreds of machines have been designed for the sole purpose of extracting the precious metal, but few of these have met with any appreciable success.

The graveyard, which is located near Oceanside, California, is the property of Chuck Martin, a writer of Wild West stories. The "bodies" located here are purely imaginary, but evidently quite real to the novelist, since he places a headstone, complete with an appropriate epitaph, into the ground whenever a character in one of his tales is unfortunate enough to "bite the dust."

In addition, the Westlands of our country contain the greatest horse racing plant in the world and least populated state of the whole 48. The track —Santa Anita, of California, is landscaped with 1,500,000 plants, shrubs and trees. It employs 3,000 persons, maintains a half dozen restaurants, and has fifteen bars. There are accomodations for 75,000 visitors and 20,000 cars.

The state with the smallest number of people is Nevada. It's the most arid also, and since over two thirds of the land still belongs to the government, no state has less privately-owned property than this one.

TIMBER!
BOB WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE DAD'S MEN? THEY'RE TOUGH WITH TERRIFIC STAMINA!
GUESS I'LL NEVER BE LIKE THEM!
WHAT ALICE SEES IN THAT GUY I JUST DON'T KNOW!
THAT DOES IT! I'LL SHOW 'EM! BU- HOW?
GEE THIS IS IT! JUST WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR -- 5 TERRIFIC BODY BUILDING COURSES FOR ONLY 2/6 I'LL WRITE TO-DAY TO THE BODY SCULPTURE CLUB
TWO WEEKS LATER
WHO'S THAT? MUST BE THE CHIEF! LOOK AT THOSE MUSCLES! HE'S CHOPPING TREES LIKE FAGGOTS!
GOSH! IT'S BOB!
ALICE! COME HERE! YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF A MAN!
BOB! YOU'RE TELLING ME!

MAN! be BIG

FOR ONLY 2/6

The Body Sculpture Club believes that every man has the right to a healthy, muscular body. So, **for 2/6 ONLY,** it offers you **FIVE** Test Courses teaching the principles of Body Sculpture. See what these amazing Courses comprise:

1. HOW TO MOULD MIGHTY ARMS. 2. CREATE A DEEP, STURDY CHEST. 3. BUILD A BROAD, BRAWNY BACK. 4. DEVELOP A GRIP OF STEEL. 5. BUILD LEGS LIKE PILLARS OF OAK! These thrilling Test Courses will build YOU a Big, Husky Body easily, surely, privately in your own home. Compiled by George F. Jowett, "Champion of Champions," and President of the Body Sculpture Club. The Body Sculpture system also reveals favourite American methods of achieving fast, spectacular results. Shows how to build extra inches - pounds of massive flesh, bulky muscles. The Body Sculpture training definitely develops a **48 INCH CHEST, 18 INCH BICEPS** - all in pounds of new, solid muscle.

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If you send **NOW** *you will receive a* **FREE** *Book with pictures and stories of famous athletes, PLUS — Two* **FREE** *Art plates showing all the Body Muscles, PLUS — details of* **FREE MEMBERSHIP** *of the Body Sculpture Club. All free to you, if you send now!*

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Get your **FIVE** Test Courses in one handy volume, PLUS your **FREE Gifts! Send 2/6 ONLY** to the Club you'll be proud of, dedicated to Building Mighty Manhood. Write now or send Coupon at once to The Body Sculpture Club, 32/7, Success House, Surbiton, Surrey.

Dear George, I enclose 2/6 P.O. (crossed and made payable to The Body Sculpture Club) for my **FIVE** Test Courses, **FREE** Book, **FREE** Charts and details of many other Club offers and privileges.

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Body Sculpture Club

32/7, SUCCESS HOUSE, SURBITON, Surrey

GUN-GHOST OF THE CLACKAMAS

(*Continued from page 28*)

for myself, Bolivar," he said bluntly. "I am here representing Dorothy McCallum and her mother. What'll you do with them?"

Sam shook his head. "Nothing."

"Mrs. McCallum would like to go back to Texas. Dorothy wants to go with her."

"They can go," Sam agreed.

"What of their cattle? What of their land and the old house?"

"If a man comes along and wants to buy what belonged to McCallum, I'll handle a sale," Sam said slowly. "I'll put up no money myself. Someone will come along."

"You could take it all," said Willowby.

"I could and I might," Sam nodded. "It would never pay for what has happened. Are you going with them?"

"I'd like to."

"Then go ahead. When you locate in Texas, let me know where to send the money."

Cam Willowby bit his lips. He nodded. "You're being more than fair, Bolivar. You'll hear from me. Dorothy and her mother are not like McCallum. You might not want to believe this, but I would never have stayed with McCallum if it hadn't been for them."

Sam Bolivar shrugged. There was no point in digging into the past.

"Good luck to you, Willowby," he said slowly. "Take care of Dorothy and her mother. They have had a rough time."

Rosita stood at the door watching Cam Willowby leave. After a time she turned to face Sam Bolivar. "Will you rebuild the house on Lost Boy mesa?" she asked.

Sam grinned even though the grin hurt his bruised lips. "Would you like me to?"

"Some day."

"Then some day we will."

Rosita closed the door. "No more visitors," she said firmly. "Not even Ty-chee."

"We'll not argue about that," said Sam Bolivar. "Come here." ★ ★ ★

THE SHERIFF THROWS HIS PUNCH

(*Continued from page 61*

me," Sandra said, hugging him tighter. "Somehow, I just knew you'd help me." She relaxed a little and looked up at him while the crowd stared.

"He thought I'd go with him, just because he had all the money from those robberies," Sandra said, her voice horrified. "When he knew I wouldn't, he pulled out that little gun. He said I had to help him get the money or he'd kill me, just like he did Mr. Davis."

"He killed Davis?"

"Yes, he said he did." Sandra sobbed again. "Mr. Davis had found out he was wanted for bank robbery."

It was all clear now. Why Newfelt had wanted to get out of town so quick, why the cashier had wanted him out of the way by getting a prisoner on his hands. Gently, Red disengaged Sandra's arms from around him. He locked Newfelt up and released Tag Flaggerty, who went back to the Rock Dust Saloon to tend bar. Red was alone when Sandra Sanderson walked in.

She looked kind of beat, he thought; shoulders slumped, a tired smile on her face. Looking bleak and forlorn, she stopped in the middle of the room. Wanting to apologize for his actions that afternoon, Red walked up close to her.

"I've been a silly little fool," Sandra said, beating him to it. "I . . . I was kind of blinded by all that smooth talk until . . ."

Red started to apologize like he had intended to all along, was sidetracked by her closeness, and ended up by asking her to marry him.

". . . until you kissed me, Red," Sandra went on, as if she had never stopped talking. "Then all his smooth talk seemed so foolish. So empty." She flushed again, but she looked squarely at him.

"When we get married, you'll need a best man," Sandra said. "For making such a helpful suggestion this afternoon, would you ask Mr. Flaggerty?" ★ ★ ★

V6. N1. MBW. JUL 52.

"Two weeks ago I bought a 'Joan the Wad' and to-day I have won £232. 10s. Please send two more." B.C., Tredegar, S. Wales.
—Extract from "Everybody's Fortune Book," 1931

GUARANTEED DIPPED IN WATER
FROM THE LUCKY SAINT'S WELL

JOAN THE WAD

is the Lucky Cornish Piskey

who Sees All, Hears All, Does All.

JOAN THE WAD is Queen of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys. Thousands of persons all over the world claim that Joan the Wad has brought them Wonderful Luck in the way of Health, Wealth and Happiness.

HISTORY FREE FOR A STAMP.

If you will send me your name and address, a 1/- stamp and a stamped addressed envelope for reply, I will send you a history of the Cornish Piskey folk, and the marvellous miracles they accomplish. JOAN THE WAD is the QUEEN of the Lucky Cornish Piskeys, and with whom good luck and good health always attend.

AS LUCK BRINGER.

Another writes: "Since the War my wife and I have been dogged by persistent ill-luck, and we seemed to be sinking lower and lower. One day someone sent us a Joan the Wad. We have never found out who it was, but coincidence if you like, within a week I got a much better job and my wife had some money left her. Since then we have never looked back and, needless to say, swear by 'Queen Joan.'"

AS PRIZEWINNER.

A young man wrote us only last week: "For two years I entered competitions without luck, but since getting Joan the Wad I have frequently been successful although I have not won a big prize, but I know that———, who won £2,000 in a competition, has one because I gave it to him. When he won his £2,000, he gave me £100 for myself, so you see I have cause to bless 'Queen Joan.'"

AS HEALER.

One Lady writes: "My sister suffered very badly for years, but since I gave her a Joan the Wad to keep near her she is much easier. Do you think this is due to Joan or the Water from the lucky Well?"

AS MATCHMAKER.

A young girl wrote and informed me that she had had scores of boy friends, but it was not until she had visited Cornwall and taken Joan back with her that she met the boy of her dreams, and as they got better acquainted she discovered he also has Joan the Wad.

AS SPECULATOR.

A man writes: "I had some shares that for several years I couldn't give away. They were 1/- shares and all of a sudden they went up in the market to 7/9. I happened to be staring at Joan the Wad. Pure imagination, you may say, but I thought I saw her wink approvingly. I sold out, reinvested the money at greater profit and have prospered ever since."

JOAN THE WAD'S achievements are unique. Never before was such a record placed before the Public. Ask yourself if you have ever heard of anything so stupendous. You have not. Results are what count, and these few Extracts from actual letters are typical of the many hundreds that are received, and from which we shall publish selections from time to time. We unreservedly GUARANTEE that these letters were absolutely spontaneous, and the originals are open to inspection at JOAN'S COTTAGE. Send at once for full information about this PROVED Luck Bringer. You, too, may benefit in Health, Wealth and Happiness to an amazing extent.

"SUNDAY GRAPHIC" PICTURE PUZZLE.

No. 175.—"Dear Joan the Wad, I received this week cheque for £71. 8s. 7d. My share of the £1,000 Prize of the 'Sunday Graphic' Picture Puzzle. I have been near winning before, but you have brought me just the extra luck I wanted."—F. T., Salisbury.

WON £153. 17s., THEN £46. 10s. 3d.

No. 191.—"Genuine account of Luck . . . since receiving Joan the Wad . . . I was successful in winning £153. 17s. in the 'People' Xword No. 178 and also the 'News of the World' Xword No. 280, £46. 10s. 3d., also £1 on a football coupon, which is amazing in itself, as all the luck came in one week."—A. B., Leamington Spa.

WINNERS OF £6. 11s. 1d.

No. 195.—"My father, myself and my sister had the pleasure of winning a Crossword Puzzle in the 'Sunday Pictorial,' which came to £6. 11s. 1d., which we put down to JOAN THE WAD, and we thank her very much."—L. B., Exning.

WON PRIZE OF £13. 13s.

No. 214.—"Arrival of your charm followed the very next day by the notification that I had won a prize of £13. 13s. in a Literary Competition."—F. H. R., Wallington.

"DAILY HERALD" PICTURE CONTEST.

No. 216.—"Since having received JOAN THE WAD I received cheque, part share in the 'Daily Herald' Picture Contest, £3. 1s."—M. F., Notting Hill.

£30,000 WINNER.

No. 222.—"Mrs. A. . . . , of Lewisham, has just won £30,000 and says she has a JOAN THE WAD, so please send one to me."—Mrs. V., Bromley.

FIRST PRIZE "NUGGETS."

No. 238.—"I have had some good luck since receiving JOAN THE WAD. I have won First Prize in 'ANSWERS' 'Nuggets.' I had JOAN THE WAD in February, and I have been lucky ever since."—Mrs. N. W., Wolverhampton.

WON "DAILY MIRROR" HAMPER.

No. 245.—"I have just had my first win since having JOAN THE WAD, which was a 'DAILY MIRROR' HAMPER."—E. M. F., Brentwood.

WON "NUGGETS" £300.

No. 257.—"My husband is a keen Competitor in 'Bullets' and 'Nuggets.' He had not any luck until I gave him JOAN THE WAD, when the first week he secured a credit note in 'Nuggets' and last week FIRST Prize in 'Nuggets' £300.—Mrs. A. B., Salford.

CAN ANYONE BEAT THIS?

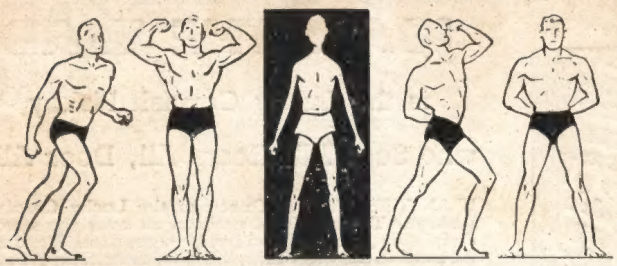
No. 286.—"Immediately after receiving my JOAN THE WAD I won a 3rd Prize in a local Derby Sweep, then I was given employment after seven months of idleness and finally had a correct forecast in Picture Puzzle 'Glasgow Sunday Mail,' which entitles me to a share of the Prize Money."—W. M., Glasgow, C.4.

All you have to do is to send a 1/- stamp (Savings Stamps accepted) and a stamped addressed envelope for the history to

60, JOAN'S COTTAGE, LANIVET, BODMIN, CORNWALL.

For Canada and U.S.A., send 50 cents for History, or $2 for both History and Mascot.
For Australia, send 1s. 6d. for History, or 8s. 0d. for both History and Mascot.

Are You Satisfied with YOUR BODY?



Let Me PROVE I Can Make You a NEW MAN in Only 15 Minutes a Day!

An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

HOW do YOU look stripped—in locker room or gym? Skinny, scrawny, sparrow-chested, self-conscious, HALF ALIVE?

How do you feel when people notice your physique? Can you stand their gaze? If you're not satisfied with your present physical development, let me PROVE I can make you a New Man—in only 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home. I'll give you biceps like iron and a fine, deep chest. I'll broaden your shoulders, add ridges of solid muscle to your stomach, fill out your arms and legs. If you are fat and flabby, I'll streamline you into a picture of radiant manhood.

What "Dynamic-Tension" Can do

How? **"Dynamic-Tension!"** That's the secret that changed me from a flat-chested 7-stone weakling into the red-blooded HE-MAN that I am to-day. That's how I'm turning thousands of fellows like yourself into New Men —with husky, handsome body and tireless endurance. I can do the same for you. Let me PROVE it!

"Dynamic-Tension" is a PRACTICAL and NATURAL method. You use no apparatus. My method actually is FUN! In only 15 minutes a day, you will actually see your muscles increase into powerful bulges of brawn and strength. You'll enjoy new stamina, a glad-to-be-alive feeling. Before you know it, you'll have a rugged, handsome body, a rough-and-ready ambition surging out of you that the world can't lick. I'll show you how it really feels to LIVE!

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All I ask is that you post the coupon NOW for my illustrated FREE book **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It shows actual photos of pupils I've changed from weaklings into remarkable specimens of manhood. If you want a body that men respect and women admire, then get this coupon into the post as fast as you can. Address to:

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I want the proof that your system of "*Dynamic-Tension*" will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book "Everlasting Health and Strength," and details of your amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER.

Name .....
(Please print or write clearly.)

Address .....

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★ MAX BRAND'S WESTERN No. 10 ★